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PRESS RELEASE

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## **Transition to a toxic-free circular economy in the carpet industry still a distant reality, despite industry initiative – European Commission needs to set up EPR scheme as part of the European Green Deal**

Exactly two years ago, the European Carpet and Rug Association (ECRA) announced actions to strengthen the reuse and recycling of carpets in Europe. Environmental Action Germany (DUH), Zero Waste Europe (ZWE), Zero Waste France, Changing Markets, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and United Kingdom Without Incineration Network (UKWIN) have today criticised the progress made to be insufficient, stating that the carpet industry is stalling for time instead of developing efficient circular economy measures. Mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes at EU level are needed to push for a transition to a toxic-free circular economy in the carpet industry.

Berlin, Brussels, London, Paris, 16.1.2020: An estimated 1.6 million tonnes of carpet are disposed of in the EU annually, with the majority ending up in landfills and incinerators, leading to negative effects for our climate and health. To stop the waste of mostly virgin fossil-based plastics, serious recycling efforts have to be made to increase the current recycling rate for carpet, which stands at just three percent recycled. Overall, it is estimated that 65 percent of EU demand for carpets is fulfilled by EU-based manufacturing.

However, the sustainability promises made by European carpet manufacturers two years ago have not yet led to any significant improvement in the disposal practices of carpets. Neither the Circular Carpet Platform (CCP), launched by the carpets industry in cooperation with the European Commission in January 2018, nor the declaration of the Circular Plastics Alliance (CPA) in September 2019 follow a comprehensive strategy in order to achieve closed-loop production. The declarations disregard requirements for eco-design and take-back-systems that are both conditions for recycling. The overall target should be closed-loop systems, which are developed so that all of the materials used in carpets, after the end of life, can get recycled without downgrading to be again used for carpets.

*"Having seen the lack of decisive action taken by the European carpet industry in the two years since the launch of the CCP, it's become increasingly clear that the carpet industry will not become circular on its own. The only thing ECRA has developed so far is a product passport for carpets, which is only a very small first step towards better product policy", says Rachel Mulrenan, Campaigns Adviser at Changing Markets. "The product passport will ensure that recyclers can assess the materials and substances used in discarded carpets, but it is not a sufficient measure to tackle the challenges of recyclability and eliminating harmful substances across the industry. More must be done."*

In order to achieve a real shift towards circular carpets, political framework conditions established by the EU are needed. By introducing an EU-wide EPR scheme with eco-modulation fees, carpet manufacturers would be encouraged to re-design their carpets to produce them toxic-free, reusable and fully recyclable. Manufacturers would also be urged to implement take-back systems. *“EU institutions recommend EPR schemes as an appropriate means of reaching recycling and climate protection targets – now is the time to establish EPR standards for carpets. In the Netherlands, progress is being made, as the Dutch Parliament recently passed a motion to begin exploring EPR legislation for their carpet industry”*, explains Larissa Copello from Zero Waste Europe.

Moreover, the European Commission has announced within its ‘European Green Deal’ that a zero pollution strategy and a sustainable products policy will be one of their main priorities. *“Circularity has to go hand in hand with stronger chemicals regulation and with the commitments made in the EU Green Deal to realise zero pollution and a toxic-free environment. We remind the European Commission that one without the other does not work and would fail to protect our health and our environment,”* states Genon Jensen, founder and executive director of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

The new circular economy action plan will set a special focus on the circular design of products in resource-intensive sectors such as textiles, which include carpets. *“72 percent of a public consultation carried out by the Commission believe that the EU legal framework to cover the waste handling of textiles is insufficiently developed. At the same time, technical solutions for circular carpets, like mono- or easy separable duo-layer-carpets without harmful substances are already on the market today. But the carpet industry obviously wants to continue with its non-ecological and linear disposal strategy as long as possible for the purpose of maximizing profits and maintaining outdated structures. We ask the EU Commission to act now and put in place mandatory rules for the carpet sector”*, insists DUH’s expert on circular economy Elena Schägg.

#### **Links:**

Eunomia Research & Consulting Ltd commissioned by Changing Markets Foundation „Policy Toolkit for Carpet Circularity in EU Member States”: [www.eunomia.co.uk/reports-tools/policy-toolkit-for-carpet-circularity-in-eu-member-states/](http://www.eunomia.co.uk/reports-tools/policy-toolkit-for-carpet-circularity-in-eu-member-states/)

Position paper “Environmental Action Germany” for a circular economy in the carpet industry (GER): [www.duh.de/teppichrecycling/](http://www.duh.de/teppichrecycling/)

Motion by Dutch parliament member Van Eijs about Extensive Producer Responsibility for all floor types (NL): [www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/detail?id=2019Z25028&did=2019D51431](http://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/detail?id=2019Z25028&did=2019D51431)

Announcement ‘Circular Carpet Platform’ of ECRA: [www.ecra.eu/activities/polymer-value-chain/](http://www.ecra.eu/activities/polymer-value-chain/)

A 2018 report ‘Testing for Toxics’ illustrates how chemicals in European carpets are harming health and hindering circular economy. It reveals the presence of toxics – including phthalates, fluorinated stain repellents and halogenated flame retardants, in carpets produced and sold by some of the largest manufacturers in Europe. <http://bit.ly/2qGAtij>