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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Programme of work and budget, and other
administrative and budgetary issues**

**Progress in the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on
marine litter and microplastics established by resolution 3/7**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

In accordance with resolution 3/7, on marine litter and microplastics,¹ adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme at its third session, held in Nairobi from 4 to 6 December 2017, the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2018 convened two meetings of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, established pursuant to that resolution, to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and to provide options for continued work to the Environment Assembly at its fourth session. By the same resolution, the Executive Director of UNEP was requested to provide a progress report to the Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the results of the group's meeting(s) so that the Assembly could determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of further work on the issue. The present report includes, in its annex, options for further work identified by the expert group. Additional information about the discussions held at the group's two meetings is available at <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/adhoc-oeeg>.

* UNEP/EA.4/1/Rev.1.

¹ UNEP/EA.3/Res.7.

I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/7

1. In accordance with resolution 3/7, on marine litter and microplastics, the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) convened two meetings of the ad hoc open-ended expert group established pursuant to the same resolution to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and to provide options for continued work to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session. The Executive Director was also requested to provide a progress update to the Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the programme of work, including on the results of the meeting(s) during which the Assembly decided to determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of the work.

2. The meetings² were held from 29 to 31 May 2018 in Nairobi and from 3 to 7 December 2018 in Geneva thanks to financial support from the Governments of Norway, Sweden and Switzerland and the Nordic Council. At the first meeting, pursuant to paragraph 3 of rule 63 of the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly, Ms. Elizabeth Taylor Jay (Colombia) and Ms. Jillian Dempster (New Zealand) were elected as co-chairs of the expert group, and Mr. Mphatso Kamanga (Malawi) was elected as Rapporteur for the two meetings.

3. The background information document for both meetings entitled “Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches – a summary for policymakers” (UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/INF/3) assesses the effectiveness of the current legal and policy framework for combating marine litter and microplastics. It also identifies gaps in that framework and options for addressing them.

4. For the first meeting, the secretariat prepared four discussion papers, on barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics, including challenges related to resources in developing countries (UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/2); on national, regional and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches, and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches (UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/3); on environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of different response options (UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/4); and on the feasibility and effectiveness of different response options (UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/5). For the second meeting, the secretariat was asked to merge these discussion papers into a single document (UNEP/AHEG/2018/2/2) and to provide a consolidated list of major barriers as set out in the annex to that document.

5. At the second meeting, participants reviewed progress made during the first meeting and held focused discussions in breakout groups and in plenary on the topics “Information and monitoring” and “governance”, taking into account the above-mentioned documentation, the discussions at the first meeting and guiding questions provided in documents UNEP/AHEG/2018/2/3 and UNEP/AHEG/2018/2/4.

II. Recommendations and suggested actions

6. Potential options for continued work, for consideration by the Environment Assembly, identified by the experts are set out in the annex to the present report. Additional information on the work of the two meetings (including meeting reports, slide shows and submissions by participants) is available at <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/adhoc-oeeg>.

7. It is suggested that the Assembly determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of the work of the expert group in accordance with paragraph 10 (g) of resolution 3/7.

² Documentation relating to the two meetings is available at <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/adhoc-oeeg>.

Annex

Potential options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly

1. The experts of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics established by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session, in December 2017, pursuant to its resolution 3/7,¹ met in Nairobi from 29 to 31 May 2018 and in Geneva from 3 to 7 December 2018 to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and to provide options for continued work to the Environment Assembly at its fourth session.
2. In addition to the mandate for their work in resolution 3/7, as a starting point for their work the experts considered a summary for policymakers entitled “Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches” presented at the third session of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.3/INF/5). They also considered a document summarizing the discussion papers presented at their first meeting and outlining possible response options and priority areas of action for the implementation of governance options (UNEP/AHEG/2018/2/2).
3. Various views were expressed during workshops and plenary meetings by the experts, including representatives of States, civil society and the private sector, on the science-based evidence of the impacts of marine litter and microplastics on human health and the environment, and on the options for addressing such impacts in the most effective and sustainable way, taking into account the interests of all concerned and affected.
4. The experts stressed the importance of reducing the impact of marine litter and microplastics on our oceans, on the marine and coastal environment and on coastal communities, human health and economies.
5. Given that a plethora of activities are already carried out with regard to marine litter and microplastics by many stakeholders and under the existing governance frameworks, the experts noted the usefulness of exploring the potential of those frameworks to contribute in a more comprehensive fashion in addressing concerns relating to marine litter and microplastics within their respective mandates. Many experts also noted that an effective response to the issue of marine litter and microplastics would require a new legally binding agreement.
6. There is a need to eliminate marine litter and microplastics from land- and sea-based sources through a holistic and evidence-based approach considering the full life-cycle to move to resource-efficient and circular management of plastic, avoiding leakage.
7. Prevention is paramount and is the priority; it is also critical to address legacy marine litter and microplastics already in the environment.
8. There is an urgent need for action as our capacity to reuse, repair, remanufacture, refurbish, recover and recycle plastic waste and manage plastic waste streams is limited because of design and certain additives and outstripped by the production and consumer demand for plastic, jeopardizing the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 14.1 (“by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”) as well as other relevant targets, such as target 12.4 on the environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes.

Potential options for continued work

9. The experts agreed that there was a need to strengthen the science-policy interface at the international level and to do more to support evidence-based approaches, improve understanding of the impacts of plastic litter on the marine environment, and promote local, national, regional and global action to eliminate marine litter. The following options were proposed:
 - (a) Consider modalities for the establishment of a global knowledge hub which could, inter alia, make it possible to develop harmonized monitoring methodologies; to collect, collate and openly share global monitoring data and information from all actors and sources, including citizen science; to ensure access to robust, reliable science and sound scientific practices, such as on additives; to develop guidelines for the sampling and analysis of marine macro- and microplastics; to identify

¹ UNEP/EA.3/Res.7.

demonstration projects and linkages with regional activities; and to map out actors, initiatives and approaches. The knowledge hub could initiate activities and serve as a source of, and clearinghouse for, national source inventories, improved waste management practices, and assessment, as well as conceptual and practical guidance materials to support governments, organizations and private entities in addressing aspects of marine litter prevention and environmentally sound and risk-based recovery;

(b) Consider the establishment of a scientific and technical advisory group on marine litter and microplastics, benefiting from the work of existing mechanisms such as the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection;

(c) Explore an interagency examination of health and environmental aspects in relation to marine litter and microplastics and plastic with a source-to-sea approach as well as an examination of costs and benefits in relation to job transition;

(d) Consider preparing a compendium of relevant existing and planned industry initiatives, including on product design, standards, innovation, production quantities and additives, to enhance transparency and calibrate partnership opportunities, as well as examples of existing national-level actions such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) to supplement the compendium.

10. The experts discussed various options and approaches for enhanced coordination and governance. They identified a number of principles that should guide follow-up in this area, including the following: Responses to the problem of marine litter and microplastics should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. Political will is essential for effective outcomes. Information and research are critical enablers. The overall approach should be comprehensive and holistic, transparent and evidence-based. It should incorporate sea-based and land-based sources, the circular economy perspective and the full-life-cycle approach. It should target the elimination and prevention of plastic waste and marine litter, and should include immediate as well as sustained, long-term action. It should be supported by and grounded in a science-policy interface; international cooperation; multi-stakeholder engagement; and the realities of differences in regional and local contexts and (technical/financial) capacities.

11. The following options for enhanced coordination and governance are proposed but are not mutually exclusive and could be explored in parallel:

(a) Consider strengthening coordination at the global level through existing partnerships and mechanisms working on marine litter and related issues, such as the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, and broadening their scope; and, if necessary, consider the feasibility and effectiveness of a potential new coordinating structure building on existing initiatives;

(b) Improve coordination at the regional level, notably with existing international instruments such as regional seas programmes, regional fisheries bodies and river-basin committees;

(c) Encourage new, and enhance existing, forms of financing and technical support to developing countries and small island developing States; assist governments and other entities in accessing available resources from a variety of sources for marine litter activities; and identify and support capacity-building needs and opportunities for, for example, developing countries, small island developing States and local communities;

(d) Consider the feasibility and effectiveness of a potential international legally binding agreement on marine litter and microplastics;

(e) Consider the establishment of a forum enabling governments, industry, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to share experiences and coordinate action on a regular or ad hoc basis.

12. There were mixed views on whether to establish an interim coordinating structure to ensure effective follow-up to the outcomes of the fourth session of the Environment Assembly in relation to the request in paragraph 10 of resolution 3/7 and the above input.

13. The reports of the first and second meetings of the ad hoc group of experts contain more detailed information on the various discussions and can be found at <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/adhoc-oeeg>.