



# AD HOC OPEN-ENDED EXPERT GROUP ON MARINE LITTER AND MICRO PLASTICS

## WWF RECOMMENDATIONS

Global Policy and Advocacy, 16 April 2017

### Summary

WWF strongly welcomes the establishment of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics and urges all member states to consider formulating a recommendation to UNEA-4 to initiate **negotiation of a new legally binding multilateral agreement to combat marine plastic pollution.**

Regardless of any such negotiations, existing efforts, through both binding and non-binding arrangements, should be strengthened and accelerated.

Marine plastic litter and microplastic pollution are urgent problems with major, adverse impacts on the health of ocean ecosystems, the integrity of food supplies, and on livelihoods. Plastic items are injuring, deforming or killing marine life directly, being mistaken for food or broken down to microplastics that attract organic pollutants facilitating their bioaccumulation in the tissues of fish and other marine life. It has been estimated that between 4,8 and 12,7 million tons of plastic are entering the ocean every year<sup>1</sup>.

Once in the ocean, plastic litter and microplastics constitute a significant, persistent and largely irrecoverable threat to marine wildlife, human health and coastal livelihoods across the globe. Marine plastic pollution is a global problem with plastic litter or microplastics having been detected in all parts of the planet's marine environment. The recovery of microplastics and plastic pollutants once they reach the marine environment is largely impracticable.

There is therefore an urgent need for member states to take global action to curtail actions that contribute to marine plastic pollution at source.

### Barriers to Combating Marine Litter and Microplastics

There is a legal gap in the global governance structure relating to marine plastic litter and microplastics, as identified and analysed in the UN Environment report "Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches".<sup>2</sup> Land based sources of marine litter and microplastics are largely uncovered and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships and the London Protocol of the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by dumping of Waste and other Matter are inadequate and ineffective in tackling sea-based sources. There is currently no legally binding instrument dedicated to tackling marine plastic pollution, no agreed pollution reduction targets, no agreed uniform obligation to develop national action plans, no agreed safe plastic production rules, no globally agreed standards for reporting and monitoring of plastics discharge and effectiveness of pollution reduction measures. A new

<sup>1</sup> Jambeck, J.R., Andrady, A., Geyer, R., Narayan, R., Perryman, M., Siegler, T., Wilcox, C., Lavender Law, K. , (2015). Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean, *Science*, 347, p. 768-771

<sup>2</sup> UN Environment, 2017. Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches.

legally binding multilateral agreement to combat all aspects of activities leading to marine plastic pollution is necessary to effectively close these gaps.

## **Potential national, regional and international response options**

WWF urges member states to use the ad hoc open-ended expert group to formulate recommendations on the nature and scope of a binding instrument needed to close these gaps in global governance arrangements for combating the discharge of marine plastic litter and microplastics - both from land based and from sea based sources.

WWF also encourages member states to benefit from the lessons learnt in the creation and implementation of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and subsequent Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The pattern – relatively few points of manufacture of product incorporated into many widely distributed products of limited lifespan inevitably causing pollution, ultimately with global impact on matters and areas of common interest and concern, especially in areas beyond national jurisdiction – is in great part very similar to the plastic pollution issue.

**WWF encourages member states to strengthen the global governance for prevention of pollution from marine litter and microplastics, through recommendations from the ad hoc open-ended expert group and recommend a focus on:**

- The establishment of a negotiations mandate for a new binding multilateral agreement at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

**A new binding multilateral agreement on marine plastic litter and microplastics should include:**

### **Tier 1 – Global goal:**

- A shared global goal of completely eliminating the discharge of plastic litter and microplastics into the oceans by 2030, building on OP1 of the resolution agreed at UNEA3<sup>3</sup>.

### **Tier 2 – Legal framework:**

- Agreed and binding national reduction targets and timetables for levels of discharge of plastics into waterways and oceans that lead to elimination of discharge by 2030 and a significant reduction of global discharge by 2025.
- An agreed monitoring, reporting and evaluation scheme for national and international marine litter and microplastics discharge and the progress made to eliminate them at a national and international level.
- Obligations to develop national and regional level action plans to combat discharge of marine litter and microplastics at all stages of supply and value chains and to establish safe plastic production.
- A global funding agreement to support the effective implementation of the agreement by all states, especially to enable LDCs and, to a lesser extent, emerging economies to meet their discharge reduction targets. This would include through measures such as commensurate levies on use and production of plastics ending up in waste streams, infrastructure development, sharing of best practices, international clean-up operations and innovation into alternative product design, product technology and waste disposal and conversion.
- An agreed ban on the addition of primary microplastics to consumer and technical products that have the potential to be released into waterways and oceans.

### **Tier 3 – Technical implementation:**

- A commitment to developing common methods, definitions and standards for an efficient global effort to combat marine plastic pollution.

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<sup>3</sup> UNEA resolution 3/7. Marine litter and microplastics.  
<https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1800210.english.pdf>