

**FAO statement for:**

**UN Environment Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics  
May 29 - 31 2018**

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of FAO, I would like to thank UN Environment for the invitation to attend the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics and for the opportunity to deliver a statement.

FAO collaborates with many organizations, including relevant UN Agencies and Programmes, NGOs and academic institutions in addressing and building knowledge on marine litter and microplastics, including as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML).

FAO considers the issue of marine litter and microplastics from three major perspectives:

1. the marine litter originating from the fishing industry, in particular abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG);
2. the impacts of microplastics on fisheries and aquaculture resources; and
3. the food safety risks of microplastics for human health through fish consumption.

A detailed overview of work that FAO has undertaken on these issues is provided in the background paper submitted to this meeting.

With regards to work to address ALDFG, we would like to highlight the Technical Consultation on the Marking of Fishing Gear that recently took place in February 2018 and that adopted text for international Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear. FAO's Thirty-third Session of its Committee on Fisheries (COFI33) in July 2018 will consider the endorsement of these Voluntary Guidelines which are considered to be an important tool in minimizing the impact of ALDFG and ghost fishing, and in combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. COFI 33 will also consider the next steps for FAO's work on this issue, namely the development of a global 'umbrella' programme, providing a framework for projects to prevent and reduce ALDFG.

With regards to microplastics, FAO has organized, with the support from UN Environment and the Government of Norway, a study and an expert workshop on microplastics in fisheries and aquaculture. This workshop built upon the work of the GESAMP Working Group 40 on microplastics and resulted in the publication of a Technical Paper that reviewed the status of knowledge on microplastics in fisheries and aquaculture, and implications for aquatic organisms and food safety.

Moreover, the FAO EAF-Nansen Programme that is supported by a research vessel, the R/V Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, includes a dedicated research theme in its science plan with the objective of assessing the occurrence of microplastics in the surface and in the water column in the areas where the research vessel operates, identify hotspots and study composition and presence of chemicals associated with them. Systematic sampling of microplastics in surface waters has been done off the whole of West Africa and in the Indian Ocean since 2017 and resulting samples/data will be analysed later this year with partner institutions.

Other steps for FAO on microplastics include building upon the information compiled in the Technical Paper and using this data to develop appropriate risk profiling tools to assess food safety impacts of

microplastic pollution in collaboration with interested partners. FAO would also welcome collaboration on microplastics and aquaculture, as well as on ecological impacts on fisheries resources.

Ladies and gentlemen, FAO hopes that the Expert Group will carefully consider sea based sources of marine litter, in particular ALDFG, within the framework of a holistic global response to the overall marine litter issue. FAO also hopes that the work of the expert group will be able to support efforts to fill knowledge gaps relating to the impacts of microplastics on fisheries resources and aquaculture.