

PLASTICS AT THE UN

The member countries of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and several global conventions and agreements have taken an interest in acting to mitigate plastic pollution, especially marine plastic litter, recognising it as a serious and rapidly growing issue of global concern which requires an urgent global response. Since 1995, one of the primary agencies tasked with building capacity among member states to address marine plastic pollution has been the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) and its constituent Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). In late October 2018, its Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR) was held for the fourth time in Bali, Indonesia.

Several representatives of the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) movement have been in attendance at the UN Environment Assembly meetings in support of a joint call for [an international legally binding agreement on plastics and plastic pollution](#). Several of those same representatives attended the IGR-4 of the GPA in pursuit of a programme of continued work for the GPA Secretariat that supports both reductions in marine litter and the ongoing work of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group (AHOEEG) established by UNEA3 to evaluate governance options for combatting marine litter and microplastics.

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31 OCT - 1 NOV: 4TH INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW OF THE GPA



Plumeria, used in offerings to the gods in Bali

The IGR-4 was held to evaluate the work done by the GPA Secretariat within the prior 5-year period and to affirm the future programme of work. The Secretariat consists of four team members - a coordinator and three subject-area program leaders - who carry out the work of the GPA and support other work done within their issue area at the wider UN Environment Programme. One of those programme leads has been directly supporting the Regional Seas Programme and the work of the AHOEEG following UNEA-3.

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The IGR-4 of the GPA intended two primary outcomes documents: the Bali Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities and the Programme of Work 2018-2022 for the GPA Secretariat. Additionally, the IGR-4 was intended to confirm the future of the GPA itself and its role in the global efforts to mitigate the land-based effects on the marine environment.

After a lengthy discussion on the draft of the Declaration, approval and confirmation on the Programme of Work 2018-2022 has been postponed. The IGR-4 also decided that more information is needed to confirm the future role of the GPA. An additional session prior to UNEA-4 in March 2019 has been scheduled to resolve these outstanding items.

Bali Declaration

A hotly debated and contested version of the Bali Declaration was produced after the Drafting Group discussion, thwarted repeatedly in its efforts to be inclusive and expansive by particular country delegations. A preamble included in the original draft stressed the importance of the GPA, including its accomplishments and limitations, and grounded the work of its Secretariat in the urgent crises currently faced by our marine environments and the work to address marine litter and microplastics being done through the UNEA process. This preamble was entirely eliminated by the Drafting Group, leaving the document without relevant context. Despite the significant contribution of the GPA's work to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs were not specifically referenced in the outcome Declaration of the IGR-4.

A watered-down version of the declaration was thus produced, outlining only the process for future discussion regarding the role of the GPA and its Secretariat in addressing the urgent harms caused by land-based activities to fragile marine environments worldwide. Additionally, the Declaration continues to focus the GPA's work only on three core issue areas: marine litter, wastewater, and nutrients. Other pressing threats to the marine environment continue to be deprioritized in the GPA's work.

Presentations given by the Secretariat in the opening of the IGR-4 outlined the significant increase in plastic production we are facing in the coming decade - an [increase of nearly 40%](#). Despite this alarming increase in production, the urgency of the GPA's work is not sufficiently reinforced in the outcome document of the IGR-4.



Sunrise on the water (© Christopher Chin)

Next Meeting of the AHOEEG

The 2nd meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics will take place in Geneva, Switzerland from 3 – 7 Dec 2018.

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Our Ocean Conference 2018

The GPA IGR-4 immediately followed the Our Ocean Conference in Bali, where [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) member groups held side events, participated in panels and workshops, and [issued a Leadership Challenge](#) in support of stronger corporate commitments and accountability to address plastic pollution worldwide.



Member organizations from Indonesia, the Philippines, Europe, the US, India, Bangladesh, Morocco, and China delivered clear messages against the myth of “recyclability” commitments made by most multinational corporations sponsoring the conference, and in other spaces highlighted the corporate actors working toward meaningful plastic pollution prevention.



What “recyclable” looks like in Bali

After the new Ellen MacArthur Foundation Declaration was announced at the conference, [international coverage of the announcement](#) included the recent work done by [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) members to conduct brand audits and expose the global corporate plastic pollution problem. [Top Polluter Coca-Cola](#) was a major sponsor of the Our Ocean conference.

Following the brand audits and the [Crisis of Convenience report published](#) by Greenpeace, [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) will continue to hold corporations accountable for their plastic pollution problem and their commitments toward sustainability.

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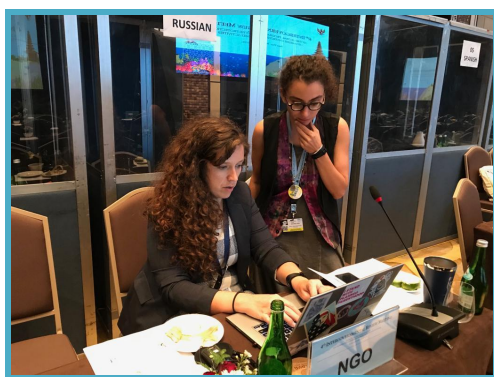
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**#break
free
from
plastic**

#BreakFreeFromPlastic is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in September 2016, over 1,000 organisations from across the world have joined the movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. These organisations share the common values of environmental protection and social justice, which guide their work at the community level and represent a global, unified vision. Sign up at www.breakfreefromplastic.org.

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This newsletter doesn't write itself

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Small but mighty!