

## PLASTICS AT UNEA

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and several global environmental agreements have taken an interest in plastic pollution, recognising it as a serious and rapidly growing issue of global concern which requires an urgent and global response. Following the UNEA3 meeting in December 2017, UN Environment formed an Ad Hoc Open Ended Expert Group (AHOEEG) to present options to combat marine plastic litter and microplastics for global consideration of member states, experts, and civil society.

Several representatives of the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) movement are in attendance for the first of two AHOEEG meetings in support of a joint call for [an international legally binding agreement on plastics and plastic pollution](#). Referred to as "Option 3" in the content analyzed in this meeting, this position, endorsed by 6 of the 9 Major Groups and co-signed by many NGOs worldwide, calls for any such convention to include certain features including a binding global reduction target, caps on production and consumption of plastics, and requirements for loss prevention, collection, and recycling of all plastics.

[Issue 1: UNEA3 Progress on Plastics \(30 Nov 2017\)](#)

[Issue 2: UNEA3 Progress on Plastics \(4 Dec 2017\)](#)

[Issue 3: UNEA3 Progress on Plastics \(6 Dec 2017\)](#)

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## *Background on AHOEEG*

At the conclusion of UNEA3 in December 2017, over 200 member states adopted a resolution establishing a process for ongoing coordinated international action to combat the marine litter and microplastics crisis plaguing the world's marine and land environments. The resolution created an Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group (AHOEEG), tasked with examining options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, including through global legally binding mechanisms.

Since December, a number of background papers have been prepared to establish the scope of the AHOEEG and to inform its ongoing work. The first of the two AHOEEG meetings is being held this week in Nairobi. The second will be held in November - the dates and location to be finalized during this first meeting.

The AHOEEG has been tasked with a technical expert examination of:

- Barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics;

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- Various national, regional, and international response options for taking action;
- Cost and benefits of those response options;
- Feasibility and effectiveness of those response options.

In the preparatory documents, the UNEP Secretariat has succinctly defined the three main response options to be considered by this group as:

- Option 1: Maintain status quo
- Option 2: Revise and strengthen existing frameworks, adding components to address industry
- Option 3: New global architecture with multi-layered governance approach (which will also include the implementation of Option 2 as the architecture is negotiated)

The [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) coordination group, in advance of the AHOEEG, have sought to work with partners and member states to reinforce that Option 1,

“Maintaining the status quo,” is not a viable option as it will not solve the plastic pollution crisis. These BFFP member groups have joined with 6 of the 9 Major Groups to endorse the pursuit of Option 3, calling for a set of strong enforcement mechanisms to ensure governments and industries comply with global targets for reduction and production and consumption.



*Tick, tock. Plastics are a ticking time bomb.*

## 28 MAY: MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS FORUM

During the one-day meeting, representatives and members of 8 and of the 9 Major Groups and Stakeholders to the UN met to discuss their inputs to the AHOEEG. Those groups include: Business & Industry, Children & Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Scientific & Technology, Women, and Workers & Trade Unions. No Local Authorities members attended.

### *Dialogue with Member States*

During the Forum, Major Groups had the opportunity for dialogue with member states, including the co-chairs of the AHOEEG, New Zealand and Colombia.

Several additional member states participated, including the United States, Italy, South Africa, Norway, and Thailand, occasionally stepping in to address the Major Groups' concerns or questions.

It was clear from this dialogue that the AHOEEG aims to stay within its mandate for discussion, focusing on marine litter (including but not limited to plastics, especially microplastics) and reviewing the feasibility, effectiveness, costs, and benefits of the response options on the table. The formal meeting will likely shy away from any drift toward political negotiations, though some consideration of the elements of such response options might still be had during this week.

Experts from the Major Groups called for considerations of consumption and production reduction and for greater responsibility from the producers for managing waste and labeling hazardous chemicals of concern in their products.

One of the most key takeaways from this dialogue is the promise that Major Groups and civil society will have a firm place in the activities of the AHOEEG, being invited to speak multiple times during the proceedings. This is a welcome change, and the representatives of aligned Major Groups are coordinating to ensure their concerns are not only heard but also addressed in the outcomes of the meeting.



Tag - you're it! Time to #BeatPlasticPollution

### Forum Outcomes Statement

Following the Major Groups and Stakeholders forum, an outcomes document was submitted to the AHOEEG to inform their work. The [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) collaborators had a significant influence in this [outcome document](#), as 7 of the 9 Major Groups supported our position in pursuit of Option 3: a new global governance structure to address plastics.

The Business and Industry Major Group, not surprisingly, disagreed with the bulk of the discussions during the forum, and submitted their [own position statement](#).

The majority of Major Groups discussed the priority of a new global governance structure, highlighting that neither the status quo nor simply reform or improving existing frameworks is sufficient to solve the problem.

The agreed Major Groups noted that a new legally-binding global governance framework should be designed to prevent plastic pollution in the marine and other environments and to support the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular, goals 3, 6, 10, 12, 14, 13, and 15). This new framework should collaborate with existing multilateral agreements where appropriate, while significantly filling the gaps as identified by UN Environment and others, in particular aiming to:

- address plastic production and consumption levels;
- drive national and regional action plans and programs toward a common objective.

*UN World Environment Day - 5 June*

World Environment Day is the United Nations' flagship celebration for encouraging worldwide awareness and action on behalf of the environment. The celebration has grown to be one of the largest global platforms for public outreach with millions of global citizens participating in over 100 countries.

This year's global host country is India, which selected the 2018 World Environment Day slogan: **#BeatPlasticPollution**. The catchphrase? "If you can't reuse it, refuse it". UN Environment's **#CleanSeas** campaign has already made great progress with over 40 national governments committed to taking action on plastic pollution issue. But, there is still a long way to go.

While actions like beach cleanups and recycling initiatives are important short-term mechanisms to raise awareness and engage and educate the public on the state of plastic pollution, these actions are only the first footstep towards solving the critical problem of plastic pollution. Education of participants in cleanups should focus on the prevention of urban and marine pollution - i.e. *using* less plastic, rather than just not littering it.

We cannot continue with the status quo, in either individual behavior, awareness raising activities, or policy approaches. We must be ambitious our efforts: push industry to reduce unnecessary packaging in all possible places; push for legally binding regulations on how much plastic is produced, how it is produced, and how it is introduced to the market and managed as

waste; and *then* push individuals to refuse, reduce, or reuse before recycling. The current push toward better waste management will not stop the harms caused by plastic throughout its life cycle or reduce the costs which are currently externalized from producers to communities and individuals.

Clean-ups can also be expanded into brand audits, which document the brands and manufacturers which have created the most litter in an area. This information can then be used as a tool to show manufacturers the damage their packaging creates, to pressure them into shifting practices and reducing unnecessary plastic packaging.

This World Environment Day, it is vital to remain focused on the root causes of plastic pollution - i.e. that single-use plastic is produced and then pushed into to markets worldwide. As such, global actions should continue to target producers of plastic packaging during campaigns and cleanup efforts to drive forward impact at scale.

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*Doing a cleanup? Add a Brand Audit!*

To really target the plastic producers, we have to collect the data that a producer's packaging is ending up in our local environments. Whether you're hosting or participating in a cleanup this summer or as part of World Environment Day, you'll find everything you'll need to document the brands of collected litter, using the [brand](#)

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[audit tools](#) available from the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) movement.

#### *Why are Plastics a Problem?*

This year's World Environment Day theme is #BeatPlasticPollution, and many actions undertaken worldwide will imply that plastic pollution begins and ends with waste management and the marine environment. However, plastic pollution affects the planet and its lifeforms in many ways:

#### *Plastic is made of fossil fuels.*

Nearly 99% of plastics are made of fossil fuels and increasingly natural gas.<sup>1</sup> Oil extraction and processing poisons soil, air, and water, damaging public health and communities.<sup>2</sup>



#### *Plastic manufacturing has been harming workers for generations.*

Employees working in extraction and manufacturing centers around the world, even in the US, suffer from very high levels of exposure to bisphenols, phthalates, and other toxic additives used in the manufacture of plastic.<sup>3</sup>



#### *Consumer goods markets worldwide are being flooded with plastic.*

Planned plastic production expansion will total \$164 billion by 2025,<sup>4</sup> much of which will be pushed into consumer goods markets.



#### *Plastic damages your long-term health.*

Chemicals leached by plastics are in the blood and tissue of nearly all of us. Exposure to them is linked to cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, endocrine disruption and other ailments.<sup>5</sup>



#### *Plastic waste is not used as a resource.*

Worldwide, since 1950 only 12% of plastic waste was "managed" with incineration, and only 9% was recycled. The rest - 79% - has accumulated in the environment.<sup>6</sup>



#### *Plastic piles up in the environment.*

Roughly 79% of all plastic ever made - 4,725 million metric tons - has accumulated in land and marine environments, entangling and poisoning wildlife.<sup>7</sup>



1. "Fossils, Plastics, & Petrochemical Feedstocks." Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). 2017.
2. Glauser, W. "New legitimacy to concerns about fracking and health." CMAJ. 2014.
3. Hines, C.J. et al. "Urinary Bisphenol A (BPA) Concentrations among Workers in Industries that Manufacture and Use BPA in the USA." Annals of Work Exposures and Health. 2017.; Petrovicova, I et al. "Occupational exposure to phthalates in relation to gender, consumer practices and body composition." Environmental Science and Pollution Research. 2016.
4. "How Fracked Gas, Cheap Oil, and Unburnable Coal are Driving the Plastics Boom." CIEL. 2017.



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5. "Perils of Plastics: Risks to Human Health & the Environment." Arizona State University Biodesign Inst. 2010
6. Geyer, R.; Jambeck, J.; Law, K.L. "Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made." Science Advances. 2017.
7. Thompson, R.C. et al. "Plastics, the Environment and Human Health." Biological Sciences. 2009.

#### Partners in the UNEA Progress on Plastics Update



## LONELY WHALE

**#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](http://www.breakfreefromplastic.org).*

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#### Remember to Share!

Get the word out about the work being done on plastics and plastic pollution at UNEA by the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) partners and supporters, by sharing any content from this newsletter or resharing some of the below posts.

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#BeatPlasticPollution  
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