

## **Draft briefing note to Senior Officials of the UN Environment Management Group on the state of implementation of the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics**

*This briefing note highlights the key issues relevant to the implementation of the UN Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 Marine litter and microplastics (UNEP/EA.3/7).*

### **1) Background and state of implementation of resolution 3/7**

This note responds to the request of the resolution UNEP/EA.3/7 on marine litter and microplastics to the Executive Director. The said resolution is attached as an Annex 1 to this note.

1. This note was prepared by UN Environment and covers the period from the adoption of UNEP/EA.3/7 up to now and focuses of the Operative Paragraphs with specific requests to the Executive Director of UN Environment.

### ***Current Progress***

2. Operative Paragraph 7 *requests the Executive Director subject to the availability of resources, to strengthen the United Nations Environment Programme's capacity and activity on marine litter and microplastics:*
  - a. OP 7.(a) *requests strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme's contribution to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter.* UN Environment, through the Global Programme of Action for the protection of marine environment from land based activities ( GPA), provides secretariat services for the partnership which includes but is not limited to regularly convening webinars and/or meetings for members as well as Steering Committee. The Framework Document for the Global Partnership on Marine Litter was revised and members provided valuable input on the direction of the partnership during meetings at the Sixth International Marine Debris Conference in March 2018.
  - b. OP 7. (b) *requests providing advice on the prioritizing of activities upon request based on best available scientific knowledge, and the most environmentally sound and cost-effective measures to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics, according to the UNEA resolutions 1/6, 2/11 and this resolution.* UN Environment provides guidance upon request. The following activities are also underway through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter:
    - i. The online Marine Litter Network, will be used as the platform for information sharing through for example, the database on measures to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics (practices and technologies). Posters and papers from the Sixth International Marine Debris Conference are being uploaded which includes more than 570 documents ([marinelitternetwork.org](http://marinelitternetwork.org));
    - ii. With support from 'Stop Plastic Waste Coalition' 1) Development of a toolkit to inform and drive decisions to address specific types of marine litter. The toolkit will include the following sections: Plastic bags, Single-use plastics items, and Personal Care and Cosmetics Products 2) Development and implementation a program to accompany a small number of voluntary pilot countries to put in place measures to reduce marine litter 3) Further expansion of the international "Stop Plastic Waste Coalition" in liaison with the Governments of France, Morocco, Monaco and the other coalition countries. UN Environment is encouraging new countries to join the coalition and act within a broader framework of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and its Clean Seas campaign;
    - iii. Developing papers of relevant issues (alternative materials, economics of marine litter, costs and benefits of waste to energy, Plastic and coral reefs, etc.). The most recent include: Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional

governance strategies and approaches<sup>1</sup>; Exploring the potential for adopting alternative materials to reduce marine plastic litter<sup>2</sup> however several others are under preparation in collaboration with other UN agencies.

- iv. OP 7.(c) *requests facilitating the establishment and implementation of regional and national action plans to prevent and reduce litter and microplastics in the marine environment, as requested by Member States*, UN Environment is 1) Carrying out a Stocktaking of Regional Action Plans on Marine Litter including desktop review, interviews, workshop and development of “toolkit” for action plan development which will inform the development of future regional and national action plans 2) Providing ongoing support to the development of regional action plans in: Pacific, South Asia, South East Asia, East Africa, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, North East Pacific 3) Providing support to the development of regional marine litter assessments upon request 4) Providing financial and technical support to national marine litter action plan development.
  - v. OP 7.(d) *requests supporting countries, upon request, in collaboration with other international organizations and relevant stakeholders, in closing data gaps and improving the availability of accessible data on sources and extent of marine litter and microplastics in the environment*, UN Environment is carrying out the following activities: 1) Harmonization of monitoring and assessment methodologies; 2) Indicator development related to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 14.1.1 on floating litter and beach litter.
  - vi. OP 7.(e) *requests closely liaising with other UN agencies to encourage them to support programmes to achieve marine litter and microplastic reduction*. UN Environment is 1) Coordinating with through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and its Steering Group and implementing joint projects with the International Maritime Organization and the Food and Agricultural Organization on sea-based sources of marine litter 2) Providing technical support to relevant processes and consultations and vice versa for UN Environment led processes; 3) Collaborating with IOC-UNESCO on e.g. indicator development for Sustainable Development Goal 14.1.1 3) Inviting other UN agencies to join the Global Partnership on Marine Litter
3. OP 9 *requests the Executive Director, subject to availability of resources, in cooperation with other relevant bodies and international initiatives, to compile the voluntary commitments as applicable targeting marine litter and microplastics and to provide an overview of their scope in support of the United Nations Environment Assembly’s work on this issue and to better understand progress towards achieving SDG Target 14.1 and present this report to UNEA-4*. Work is underway for the preparation of this report on these voluntary marine litter commitments in coordination with relevant entities such as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) to see how to make best use of existing platforms. An easy-access submission form is also being prepared to record additional voluntary commitments to be taken into account in the report and will be circulated in October 2018.
  4. OP 10 *decides to convene meetings of, subject to the availability of resources, an Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group, to further examine the barriers to, and options for, combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land based sources*. UN Environment has compiled relevant resolutions, decisions and reports as per May 2018 when the First Meeting of the Ad hoc open ended experts group was held 29-31 May 2018 in Nairobi Kenya with 266 participants. Documents were prepared on (i) Barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics, including challenges related to resources in developing countries, (ii) Range of national, regional and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches, and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches; (iii) Environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of different response options; (iv) Feasibility and effectiveness of different response options. These are being merged and preparations are underway for the second meeting which will identify potential options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly and provide a progress update on the Programme of Work of the Ad hoc open ended experts group, including on the results of the meeting(s) in order for the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly to determine on the future direction, timing, and expected outcomes of the work.
  5. OP 11 *requests the Executive Director to report on the implementation of 1/6, 2/11 and this resolution to UNEA-4*, UN Environment will invite relevant entities to report on a voluntary basis after which a summary report will be produced.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://papersmart.unep.org/resolution/uploads/unep\\_ahcg\\_2018\\_inf3\\_full\\_assessment\\_en.pdf](https://papersmart.unep.org/resolution/uploads/unep_ahcg_2018_inf3_full_assessment_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25485/plastic\\_alternative.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25485/plastic_alternative.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

## **2) Potential relevance to and contributions from the UN agencies to the implementation of Resolution 1/6, 2/11 and 3/7**

- 1) Consider voluntary reporting on activities that contribute to the implementation of the resolutions. An invitation to contribute will be circulated in October for online submission in support of the preparation of an analysis of the progress on implementation of 1/6, 2/11 and 3/7 as requested in operative paragraph 11 in resolution 3/7;
- 2) Engage in the Second meeting of the Ad hoc open ended experts group as per the request in operative paragraph 10. The issue of marine litter and microplastics is highly relevant to several UN Agencies, and the UN Environment Programme would very much welcome active contributions and inputs from relevant and interested UN Agencies to join in the conversation and share their views and contributions in the upcoming Ad hoc open ended experts group (date to be announced shortly).
- 3) Join and consider coordination activities through e.g. the Global Partnership on Marine Litter as highlighted in resolutions 1/6, 2/11 and 3/7.
- 4) OP 7.(e) requests closely liaising with other UN agencies to encourage them to support programmes to achieve marine litter and microplastic reduction. These could include:
  - a. Review policy relevant recommendations, priority areas for action and areas in need of additional research in “Marine Plastic Debris & Microplastics: Global Lessons and Research to Inspire Action and Guide Policy Change <sup>3</sup>” which was prepared upon request by the first UN Environment Assembly, and identify relevant sections for respective mandates
  - b. Support the implementation of regional action plans on marine litter
  - c. Identification of joint projects
- 5) Participate in the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly.

While not specifically related to the resolution, all agencies may wish to consider promoting and implementing Greening the Blue activities to reduce unnecessary single-use plastic within their operations.

Annex

Annex I: Resolution 3/7 Marine litter and microplastics

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7720/-Marine plastic debris and microplastics Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change -2016Marine Plastic Debris and Micropla.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7720/-Marine_plastic_debris_and_microplastics_Global_lessons_and_research_to_inspire_action_and_guide_policy_change_-2016Marine_Plastic_Debris_and_Micropla.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y)



Distr.: General  
30 January 2018

Original: English



**United Nations  
Environment Assembly of the  
United Nations Environment Programme**

**United Nations Environment Assembly of the  
United Nations Environment Programme**  
**Third session**  
Nairobi, 4–6 December 2017

### **3/7. Marine litter and microplastics**

*The United Nations Environment Assembly,*

*Reaffirming* General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recalling Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”,

*Recalling* its resolutions 1/6, entitled “Marine plastic debris and microplastics,” and 2/11, entitled “Marine plastic litter and microplastics,” on measures to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics,

*Acknowledging* the increased knowledge on the levels, sources, negative effects of and measures to reduce marine litter and microplastics, as summarized in the 2016 assessment report by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled *Marine plastic debris and microplastics: Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change*, the First World Ocean Assessment and numerous other reports and scientific publications,

*Noting* the report entitled “Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches” prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme pursuant to Environment Assembly resolution 2/11,

*Noting also* the commitment of member States to the “Our ocean, our future: call for action” declaration, adopted at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, in June 2017, and the voluntary commitments presented there, at the Our Ocean conferences held in Washington D.C., Valparaiso, Chile, and Valletta, Malta, and at the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, as well as the Group of 20 Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted in 2017, on efforts to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics,

*Noting further* the International Coral Reef Initiative recommendation to reduce plastic microbead pollution in the marine environment, adopted in November 2016, and the call for action by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme on plastic microbeads,

*Noting with concern* the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine plastic litter and the expected increase in negative effects on marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism, local societies and economies, and the urgent need for strengthened knowledge of the levels and effects of microplastics and nanoplastics on marine ecosystems, seafood and human health,

*Recognizing with concern* that natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events cause significant input of litter and microplastics to the marine environment,

*Underlining* that preventive action through waste minimization and environmentally sound waste management should be given the highest priority and that that is especially important in geographical areas with the largest sources of marine plastic litter, and recognizing that technology and effective measures already exist that may provide cost-effective, environmentally sound and locally and regionally adapted solutions,

*Emphasizing* that technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and resource mobilization from all sources are important elements to combating marine litter and microplastics,

*Acknowledging* the challenges of addressing marine plastic pollution in the face of increasing production and consumption of plastic in products and packaging, and urging all countries and other stakeholders to make responsible use of plastic while endeavouring to reduce the unnecessary use of plastic and to promote research and application of environmentally sound alternatives,

1. *Stresses* the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics;
2. *Urges* all actors to step up actions to “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”;
3. *Encourages* all member States, based on best available knowledge of sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, to prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment;
4. *Also encourages* all member States and invites other actors, taking into account national conditions:
  - (a) To fully implement the recommendations and actions set out in its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11, as relevant, and emphasizes that those resolutions have important elements and guidance that are not repeated in the present resolution;
  - (b) To cooperate to establish common definitions and harmonized standards and methodologies for the measurement and monitoring of marine litter and microplastics;
  - (c) To develop and implement action plans for preventing marine litter and the discharge of microplastics; encouraging resource efficiency, and increasing collection and recycling rates of plastic waste and re-design and re-use of products and materials; and avoiding the unnecessary use of plastic and plastic containing chemicals of particular concern where appropriate;
  - (d) To include marine litter and microplastics in local, national and regional waste management plans and in wastewater treatment where appropriate;
  - (e) To develop integrated and source-to-sea approaches to combat marine litter and microplastics from all sources, taking into account that plastic litter and microplastics are transported to the oceans from land-based sources by rivers and run-off or wind from land and that plastic litter is an important source of microplastics, and include the land/sea and freshwater/sea interface in action plans for preventing marine litter, including microplastics;
  - (f) To step up measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics from sea-based sources, such as fisheries, aquaculture, off-shore installations and shipping, including through the promotion of accessibility and use of port reception facilities;
  - (g) To encourage the inclusion of measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics, in particular from land-based sources, in plans to prevent and reduce damage from natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events;
  - (h) To prioritize, where feasible, clean-up of the marine environment in areas where marine litter poses a significant threat to human health, biodiversity, wildlife and the coastal ecosystems, conducted in a cost-effective way;
5. *Recognizes* that the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, can contribute significantly to preventing and reducing marine litter and microplastics, including through information sharing, awareness-raising, developing new environmentally sound technologies, capacity-building and clean-up actions, and encourages cooperation between

Governments, regional bodies, the private sector and civil society, including through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and its regional nodes, to that end;

6. *Notes* the important role of key sectors such as plastics producers, retailers and the consumer goods industry, as well as importers, packaging firms and transport firms, to contribute to the reduction of marine litter, including microplastics, arising from their products and activities, as well as to provide information on the impacts arising from their products throughout their life cycle, and encourages innovative approaches such as the use of extended producer responsibility schemes, container deposit schemes and other initiatives;

7. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to strengthen the capacity and activity of the United Nations Environment Programme on marine litter and microplastics, including by:

(a) Strengthening the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter;

(b) Providing advice on the prioritizing of activities upon request based on best available scientific knowledge, and the most environmentally sound and cost-effective measures to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics, according to resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution;

(c) Facilitating the establishment and implementation of regional and national action plans to prevent and reduce litter and microplastics in the marine environment, as requested by member States;

(d) Supporting countries, upon request and in collaboration with other international organizations and relevant stakeholders, in closing data gaps and improving the availability of accessible data on the sources and extent of marine litter and microplastics in the environment;

(e) Closely liaising with other United Nations agencies to encourage them to support programmes to reduce marine litter and microplastics;

8. *Invites* relevant international and regional organizations and conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the International Maritime Organization and its conventions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, regional seas conventions and programmes, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, as appropriate within their mandates, to increase their action to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics and their harmful effects and to coordinate where appropriate to achieve that end;

9. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources and in cooperation with other relevant bodies and international initiatives, to compile voluntary commitments, as applicable, targeting marine litter and microplastics; to provide an overview of their scope in support of the work of the United Nations Environment Assembly on that issue; to better understand progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 14.1; and to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the matter;

10. *Decides* to convene, subject to the availability of resources, meetings of an open-ended ad hoc expert group to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and:

(a) Requests the Executive Director to provide the secretariat for that work;

(b) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will be informed by and build on, among others, relevant resolutions, decisions and reports by the United Nations Environment Programme, other organizations, member States and stakeholders as appropriate;

(c) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will include experts with the relevant technical expertise from all member States, representation from international and regional conventions and organizations and relevant stakeholders;

(d) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will have the following initial programme of work:

(i) To explore all barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics, including challenges related to resources in developing countries;

- (ii) To identify the range of national, regional and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches, and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches;
  - (iii) To identify environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of different response options;
  - (iv) To examine the feasibility and effectiveness of different response options;
  - (v) To identify potential options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly;
- (e) *Decides* to convene at least one meeting, but no more than two meetings, before the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, including enabling the participation of developing countries;
- (f) *Requests* the Executive Director to provide a progress update to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the programme of work, including on the results of the meeting(s);
- (g) *Decides* to determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of the work at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly;
11. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the implementation of its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution.
-