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United Nations Task Team on Marine Litter and Microplastics

Terms of Reference

A. Background

At its third session in December 2017, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.3/Res.7) called for the establishment of an Ad Hoc Open-ended Experts Group to explore all barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics. In March 2019, through its resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 (Annex I), emphasizing the importance of strengthened coordination and multi-stakeholder cooperation for achieving long-term elimination of plastic discharge into the oceans, the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly extended the mandate of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Experts Group and invited the Environment Management Group (EMG) to engage in and contribute to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert group on Marine Litter and Microplastics by providing inter alia a mapping of all relevant United Nations agencies, programmes, initiatives and expertise with relevance to marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics. The resolution also invited UN agencies to contribute to addressing marine litter through activities such as raising awareness and promoting environmentally sound management and marine plastic prevention.

In response to this call, following the midterm meeting of its technical segment held in May 2019, the EMG Senior Officials decided to establish an interagency Task Team to prepare the requested system-wide contribution.

B. Objective and scope

The purpose of the Task Team is to expand UN system involvement and strengthen the coordination of UN-system support to Member States in addressing the global challenge posed by marine plastic debris and microplastics.

Key objectives include:

- To provide a comprehensive overview of UN system activities and initiatives that directly or indirectly address marine litter and microplastics, contributing to a broader stock-taking and “state of action” analysis under way by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Experts Group on marine litter and microplastics;
- Serve as a platform for information exchange among UN system entities on activities and expertise related to marine litter and microplastics;
- To create synergy and avoid duplication of work by identifying further collaboration opportunities including at the country level, or prospects to expand existing initiatives within the UN system related marine litter and microplastics;



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- To raise awareness within and outside of the UN system on sources and impacts of marine litter and microplastics, highlighting the linkages to the issue of different sectors and mandates, and identifying entry points to addressing the challenge.

The Task Team shall organize its work to undertake the following main activities:

- Undertake a mapping exercise of initiatives and expertise with relevance to marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics, identifying possible gaps, areas of synergy and opportunities for further cooperation.
- Based on the outcome of the mapping report, provide inputs, case studies and recommendations to the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics.
- Enable information and knowledge exchange among EMG members on mandates, expertise and initiatives, for instance, in the form of a joint calendar of relevant events and webinars with the purpose to generate prerequisites for informed decision making, efficient use of funds and avoided duplication of efforts.

The Task Team shall apply a life-cycle approach to discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans. Relevant interventions may cover various parts of the lifecycle of e.g. plastics production. The mapping of initiatives in this regard may also include efforts within the UN system to reduce its own plastic waste.

C. Composition

Under the leadership of UNEP, the Task Team is composed of focal points nominated by EMG members and is open to observers from non-UN entities whose knowledge, activities or expertise will be relevant and useful to the work of the Group. Task Team meetings will be organised by the EMG Secretariat, primarily through electronic means. A list of Task Team members is attached as Annex II.

D. Approach

The Task team may consider utilizing the data collection methodology prepared for gathering data for the broader stock-taking exercise from governments and the private sector (the Akvo RSR platform), for the collection of data from the UN system. The application of this tool would ensure consistency with other inputs to the state of play analysis prepared by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group. In addition, the Task Team may consider designing a complementary survey for gathering additional information from UN entities. For information on internal efforts to reduce plastic waste in the UN system, the Greening the Blue inventory may provide additional data.



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E. Work Plan

	2019			2020										2021
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Feb
Finalization and agreement on ToR		■												
Design survey for information collection				■										
Update on progress to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group		■						■					■	
Circulation of survey				■	■	■								
Webinar I					■									
Drafting of analysis					■	■	■							
Analysis for comments							■	■	■					
Finalization of analysis								■	■	■				
Webinar II						■	■							
Webinar III														
Report on progress to EMG Senior Officials								■				■		
One UN event at the UN Oceans Conference in Lisbon. In-person meeting of the Task Team									■					
Provision of analysis to the Ad Hoc open-ended Expert Group														
Submission of final output to UNEA V														■

**Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly on 15 March 2019
4/6. Marine plastic litter and microplastics**

For questions related to the resolution, please contact Ms. Heidi Savelli-Soderberg, Programme Officer, UNEP (heidi.savelli@un.org)

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

**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme
Fourth session
Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019**

**Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment
Assembly on 15 March 2019**

4/6. Marine plastic litter and microplastics

The United Nations Environment Assembly,

Noting with concern that the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale, negatively affecting marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, societies, livelihoods, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation, tourism and economies,

Noting that microplastics added to products or generated during their life cycle are found along the food chain and that there is therefore concern about their potential to negatively affect human health, including food safety, and that those aspects thus require further examination,

Reiterating the importance of the long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics into the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics, as stressed in Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics,



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Stressing also the importance of the prevention and reduction of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, from both land and sea-based sources, for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ and the Sustainable Development Goals,

Stressing further the importance of more sustainable management of plastics throughout their life cycle in order to increase sustainable consumption and production patterns, including but not limited to the circular economy and other sustainable economic models, and the importance of environmentally sound waste management, resource efficiency, the “three Rs” (reduce, reuse, recycle), sustainable materials management, innovation in related technologies, the environmentally sound clean-up of marine plastic litter, and international cooperation for effectively preventing pollution from marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics,

Stressing the urgent need to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels and to do more to support science-based approaches; improve understanding of the fate, distribution and impact of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, on the marine environment; and promote local, national, regional and global action to prevent and eliminate the discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment,

Underlining the urgent need to consider a strengthened science-policy interface and global coordination, cooperation and governance to more effectively implement its resolutions 1/6 on marine plastic debris and microplastics, 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics and 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics,

Taking note of important developments with regard to exploring options within the mandates of relevant existing international agreements and organizations for addressing marine litter, in particular:

(a) The recommendations of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its fourteenth meeting to consider further options under the Convention, including establishing a partnership on plastic waste;

(b) The adoption of an action plan by the International Maritime Organization Marine Environment Protection Committee, supported by the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (1972) and the Protocol thereto, to reduce marine plastic litter from ships;

Recognizing the work of the regional seas conventions and programmes for the protection of the marine and coastal environment and reiterating its invitation to regional and international organizations and conventions to increase their action to prevent and reduce marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, and the harmful effects thereof and, where appropriate, coordinate such action to achieve that end,

Acknowledging the need for high-quality data and effective monitoring of land- and sea-based sources, and of quantities and the fate and impact of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, and its potential impact on human health, through harmonized methodologies, to enable better and more effective action,

Noting the framework document for the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, agreed upon by its steering committee in October 2018, which outlined the purpose, function and organization of the Global Partnership as a platform for all stakeholders for bottom-up, voluntary cooperation on activities such as the sharing of experience and information and “matchmaking” for project cooperation,

Taking into account the outcome of the work of the open-ended ad hoc expert group on marine litter and microplastics, established by the Environment Assembly at its third session by its resolution 3/7, and in particular the need to increase coherence, coordination and synergies between existing mechanisms and to enhance cooperation and governance with a view to better

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.



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addressing the challenges posed by marine litter and microplastics at the local, national, regional and global levels,

Mindful of the particular responsibility of the United Nations Environment Programme, pursuant to its mandate,² to keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments,

1. *Calls upon* Member States and other actors at the local, national, regional and international levels, including in the private sector, civil society and academia, to address the problem of marine litter and microplastics, prioritizing a whole-life-cycle approach and resource efficiency, building on existing initiatives and instruments, and supported by and grounded in science, international cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, subject to the availability of resources and benefiting from the work of existing mechanisms, to immediately strengthen scientific and technological knowledge with regard to marine litter, including marine plastic litter and microplastics, through the following activities:

(a) Convening existing relevant science advisory initiatives with input from Member States, as appropriate, to provide input into the activities outlined in paragraphs 3 and 7 of the present resolution;

(b) Compiling available scientific and other relevant data and information to prepare an assessment on sources, pathways and hazards of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics pollution, and its presence in rivers and oceans; scientific knowledge about adverse effects on ecosystems and potential adverse effects on human health; and environmentally sound technological innovations;

(c) Recommending indicators to harmonize monitoring, reporting and assessment methodologies, taking into account key sources of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, in cooperation with relevant international organizations;

(d) Gathering information with a view to informing policies and action regarding environmentally sound technological innovations, options and measures for reducing the risk of discharges of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment, taking into account the whole life cycle of plastics, in support of local, national, regional and global action;

3. *Decides* to strengthen coordination and cooperation by establishing, subject to the availability of resources and building on existing initiatives, a multi-stakeholder platform within the United Nations Environment Programme to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination, through a life-cycle approach, of discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans. This may include the following functions:

(a) Serving as a forum for enabling governments, industry, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to share experiences and coordinate action on a regular or ad hoc basis;

(b) Serving as a repository for assessments of the ways in which land- and sea-based sources of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, are addressed at the national, regional and international levels; conceptual and practical guidance materials to help governments, organizations and private entities address aspects of marine litter; and current action plans, management practices and guidelines for enabling, enhancing and supporting action to prevent the discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment;

² See General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972.



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(c) Raising global awareness of the issue with a wide variety of audiences, including governments, policymakers, resource managers, educators, private-sector entities and the public;

(d) Establishing and maintaining a database of technical and scientific information related to marine litter, such as inventories of discharges into the marine environment, scientific studies and innovations to address marine litter;

(e) Promoting collaboration among relevant scientific mechanisms to facilitate access to scientific data and information in order to disseminate sound scientific practices, such as guidelines for the sampling and analysis of marine macroplastics and microplastics, and to improve the policy relevance of research;

(f) Promoting action in the framework of regional seas conventions and programmes, subject to the availability of resources, to address marine litter through action plans, protocols, partnerships and other activities;

4. *Recalls* its resolution 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics and invites Member States, in close collaboration with the private sector, to:

(a) Reduce the discharge of microplastics into the marine environment, including, where possible, through the phasing out of products that contain microplastics;

(b) Foster innovation in product design to reduce secondary microplastics release from land- and sea-based sources and improve waste management where needed;

(c) Prevent losses of primary microplastics, in particular pre-production pellets (flakes and powders), to prevent spillage into the environment across the whole manufacturing and supply chain;

5. *Requests* the Executive Director, through the United Nations Environment Programme's 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns,³ to develop guidelines for the use and production of plastics in order to inform consumers, including about standards and labels; to incentivize businesses and retailers to commit themselves to using sustainable practices and products; and to support governments in promoting the use of information tools and incentives to foster sustainable consumption and production;

6. *Invites* all Member States, relevant organizations in the United Nations system, other relevant regional and international organizations, the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations and individuals, on every appropriate occasion, including such opportunities as World Environment Day and World Oceans Day, to:

(a) Consider the contribution they can make to addressing marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

(b) Raise awareness of the importance of, and encourage, sustainable consumption and production, in line with Environment Assembly resolution 4/1 on innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production, with regard to products likely to generate marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

(c) Promote environmentally sound waste management and marine plastic litter recovery in line with paragraph 4 (h) of Environment Assembly resolution 3/7;

7. *Decides* to extend until its fifth session the mandate of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics established by its resolution 3/7, and requests the expert group, building on its previous work, to:

(a) Take stock of existing activities and action by governments, regional and global instruments, international organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and

³ A/CONF.216/5, annex.



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other relevant contributors to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics with the aim of the long-term elimination of discharge into the oceans;

(b) Identify technical and financial resources or mechanisms for supporting countries in addressing marine plastic litter and microplastics;

(c) Encourage partnerships that undertake activities such as the development of source inventories, the improvement of waste management, awareness-raising and the promotion of innovation in relation to the prevention of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

(d) Analyse the effectiveness of existing and potential response options and activities with regard to marine litter and microplastics at all levels to determine the contribution that they make to solving the global problem;

8. *Invites* the Environment Management Group to engage in and contribute to the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics by providing, inter alia, mapping of all United Nations agencies, programmes, initiatives and other sources of expertise relating to marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

9. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session on the progress achieved in the implementation of the present resolution.



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Annex II

List of focal points

	Focal Point	Entity	
1	Mr. Andrew Hudson	UNDP	
2	Mr. Marco Keiner	UNECE	
3	<i>Mr. Janaka da Silva</i>	<i>IUCN</i>	
4	Mr. Henrik Enevoldsen	UNESCO	
5	Ms. Lara Geadah	ESCWA	
6	Ms. Ingrid Giskes	FAO	
	Mr. Lev Neretin	FAO	
7	Ms. Amanda Kron	OHCHR	
8	Mr. David Osborn	IAEA	
9	Mr. Yasuhiko Kamakura	ILO	
10	Mr. Stefanos Fotiou	ESCAP	
11	Mr. Tobias Salathé	Ramsar	
12	Ms. Joanna Post	UNFCCC	
13	Ms. Kei Ohno-Woodall	BRS	
14	Ms. Nahomi Nishio	UNIDO	
15	Mr. Aik Hoe LIM	WTO	
16	Mr. Andre Dzikus	Habitat	
	Ms. Nao Takeuchi	Habitat	
17	Mr. Loukas Kontogiannis	IMO	
18	Ms. Heidi Savelli	UNEP	
	Ms. Stephanie Van der Poel	UNEP	
19	Ms. Jennifer de France	WHO	
20	Mr. Joseph Appiott	CBD	
	Mr. Neil Pratt	CBD	
21	Ms. Delphine Arri	World Bank	
22	<i>Ms. Elisabetta Cornago</i>	<i>OECD</i>	
23	<i>Ms. Carole Manceau</i>	WFP	<i>observer</i>