



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**EMG**

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## **1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Task Team on Marine Litter and Microplastics**

GoToMeeting, Thursday, 24.10.2019  
14:30 to 16:00 (Geneva time)

### Meeting Report

#### **Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda**

The EMG Secretariat welcomed participants (Annex I: List of Participants) to the first meeting of the Task Team, drawing participant's attention to the agenda (Annex II) and draft Terms of Reference that had been shared with Task Team members in advance of the meeting. Reference was made to the UNEA resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6, operative paragraph 8 (March 2019), that invited 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.

Following UNEA, the EMG Senior Officials (May 2019) decided to establish a Task Team to respond to this request, contributing to the work of the Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group. This first meeting offered an opportunity for Task Team members to share information about their work related to marine litter and to reflect on the Terms of Reference for the Task Team, including its expected accomplishments in the short- and long term. In addition to preparing the requested mapping which would inform future efforts by identifying gaps and making reference to existing knowledge, frameworks and guidance, the Task Team could consider how the UN system could effectively support addressing the global challenge posed by marine plastic debris and microplastics.

#### **Entry points for tackling marine litter and microplastics**

UNEP gave a presentation on the marine litter challenge, highlighting potential entry points that could be relevant to consider in addressing these challenges in the context of the Task Team.

UNEP underlined that there is a clear call from Member States for better coordination on activities and initiatives related to marine litter, for which there currently is a lot of interest in the world. Member States are interested in understanding how the UN system is addressing the marine litter challenge and to ensure that the UN system is coordinating its work rather than duplicating efforts.

The Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group is taking stock of existing activities towards long-term elimination of discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans. The University of Plymouth has been contracted by UNEP to coordinate data collection with other universities with the aim to compile information on all action and activities in this area of work by governments, the private

sector and major groups and stakeholders. A repository for this data and a survey-based system for data collection is being set up, looking at normative, evidential and capacity building activities, their intensity and potential impact. The Task Team could consider channeling the UN mapping through this system, if members agree.

The Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group is also preparing an inventory of financial resources, looking at what is available in terms of financing for action to address or prevent discharge of waste into oceans. An inventory of technical resources and mechanism is also under way.

A subgroup under the Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group preparing an analysis of effectiveness of existing potential response options, will meet for the first time in Bangkok 18-22 November. A progress report on the UN Task Team will be delivered to this meeting. Following the November meeting, the Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group will meet in May (Latin America) and October (Africa) 2020.

Following UNEP's presentation, meeting participants provided brief overviews of their agencies' activities in the area of marine litter and microplastics, to help create an understanding of the scope of information that would be fed into the mapping.

- WHO supported the idea of mapping exercise to better understand what others in the UN system are doing in this area. WHO has recently started working on microplastics, having published a report on the state of evidence of microplastics in drinking water, addressing potential risks for human health. A second report will expand the scope to look at other sources of exposure to microplastics, including food. WHO will work to summarize data on microplastics in the environment and human exposure to these, with the aim to identify potential gaps and needs for further research. Finally, WHO made reference to a workshop to be held in Norway on 25 October organized by the Norwegian Development Agency, which could inform and feed into the work of the Task Team. UNEP confirmed that the workshop focuses on work carried out by recipients of Norwegian funding, having a broader scope than only the UN.
- It was suggested that an overview of relevant events be added as an output to the Task Team's ToR. Such an overview could help avoid overlaps in terms of timing and content of events organized.
- FAO shared that it is approaching marine litter and microplastics through two major work streams covering sea-based and land-based sources. With regard to sea-based sources FAO looks into abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear. Recently, a working group (43) on sea-based sources of marine litter was established under GESAMP (Group of Experts on Scientific Aspects of Marine and Environmental Protection), an interagency mechanism with members from IMO, DAO, UNESCO, UNIDO, UN, UNEP, UNDP, IAEA and WMO. A major assessment of sea-based sources is expected in 2020. FAO recommended that GESAMP join as an observer to the Task Team. With regard to land-based resources, FAO is mainly focusing on assessments, particularly concerning microplastics. A global symposium on soil pollution was held in 2018, in which UNEP, the chemicals conventions and WHO participated. Finally, FAO is exploring the issue of agricultural plastics, an area of work that has not received enough attention.
- UNESCO informed that it co-sponsors Working Group 40 under GESAMP, that has produced a number of publications and global assessments on microplastics. Two new publications are expected: one on the outcome of a workshop on risk assessment approaches that can be applied to plastics and microplastics. UNESCO is particularly interested in efforts that contribute to synthesizing underlying science that is needed to build the basis for management approaches. The GESAMP working group is looking to assess currents and

effects of nano-sized plastics on marine organisms and make research- and policy relevant recommendations in this regard. The Working Group also works to assess the significance of plastics and microplastics as a vector for indigenous and non-indigenous organisms, to develop a risk assessment methodology and develop guidance for the public on marine plastics. UNESCO highlighted that coordination on marine litter and microplastics is already well coordinated through GESAMP. Finally, UNESCO suggested that the Task Team could contribute to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The EMG Secretariat further proposed that One UN events could be organized linked to the Decade, focusing on awareness raising and advocacy.

- ILO shared that it is not yet directly engaged but internally considering how the organization could contribute to the issue of marine littering, with focus on creating decent and safe jobs. Taking a holistic, integrated approach in line with circular economy, ILO could bring experience and knowledge from different industries such as the chemical industry, agriculture and sea and navigation industries. A more proactive approach could involve looking into possibilities for workers at sea to contribute to garbage collection.
- Marine litter is a new topic for UNICEF, where there is interest in collaborating with others (for instance WHO) on understanding the impact of microplastics on children, taking into account increasing evidence that plastic byproducts are found in children's blood and urine samples. UNICEF is preparing a framework for environmental pollution and climate change, where microplastics will feature as part of pollution.
- ESCAP stressed the added value of understanding what is happening around this thematic globally and in other regions. ESCAP's primary entry point has been normative work, consensus building and capacity development around municipal solid waste management, addressing land-based marine litter in coastal settlements. ESCAP is supporting local authorities with recycling, segregation at source and integrated resource recovery in a number of countries in the region. Efforts to quantify contributions of informal waste workers to improve municipal recycling of waste are ongoing. Key convenings before the meeting of the Ad-hoc Open-ended Expert Group in November include the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-Pacific Day of the Oceans on 8 November with a dedicated focus on marine litter, and the CF solutions week 11-14 November. The theme of the next ESCAP Commission Session in May 2020 will be on oceans, for which a flagship theme study will be prepared including a dedicated chapter on marine debris. Finally, reference was made to the recent Asean Declaration on marine plastics, in the context of which support is seen for a resolution for single use plastics at the Commission session.
- ESCWA is new to the topic of marine litter. A joint project with UNECA and UNECE in the Mediterranean area is underway, focusing on waste reduction. This project could be an avenue to look more specifically at plastic waste.
- Ramsar confirmed its strong interest and investment in the topic, taking into account that wetlands are directly affected by microplastic pollution.
- Working with industry, UNIDO addresses land-based sources by promoting reduced plastic use through product design, recycling and sustainable life-cycle assessments. A report addressing marine litter from the perspective of the circular economy was published. A new project in South Africa in collaboration with CSRI considers substitution of plastics in products with other more sustainable materials.
- UN-Habitat focusses on municipal solid waste management, promoting sustainable waste management in cities as the custodian of SDG target 11.6.1, for which a new monitoring methodology is being developed. A plastic leakage model is being developed in a collaboration project with GIZ.
- IUCN shared that it has worked on assessing leakage, reviewing existing methodologies with a focus on East Asia, Africa and SIDS in the Pacific and the Caribbean. A tool for identifying hotspots developed in collaboration with UNEP will be rolled out shortly. Work has been

- IAEA confirmed its interest in the topic of plastics and marine plastics, conducting work on irradiated plastic recycling methods and developing nuclear and isotopic tracing techniques to assess environmental impacts of marine plastic particles on marine organisms such as coral, fish and plants. The latter looks not only on the role of the plastic particle itself, but also on what is bound onto the plastics, trying to identify metabolic effects of plastics and their co-contaminants in organisms.
- OECD is working on assessing and preparing a set of policy guidelines on how to address secondary microplastics in marine and freshwater environments, with specific focus on two subsectors (automotive textiles and tires). A report in this regard will be finalized in 2020, looking at technology options and policy approaches to addressing and mitigating leakage from these sectors. In addition, a report on the implications of different policy approaches to addressing single use plastics across countries is being finalized, comparing how taxation, regulatory and voluntary approaches do in terms of environmental, economic and behavioral implications. OECD is starting work on criteria for sustainable design of plastics from a chemicals perspective, with the aim to prepare guidelines for sustainable product design.
- OHCHR is new to the area of marine litter and microplastics, taking a human rights perspective in terms of the impacts on marine litter on ecosystems and how this affects livelihoods, food security cultural and health aspects etc. In terms of previous engagements, the special rapporteur on human rights and environment attended a panel discussion during UNEA IV, on the role of environmental justice on communities affected by marine litter and microplastics.
- UNEP concluded that the discussion had pointed to several opportunities for collaboration. With regard to ILO's intervention, UNEP highlighted that not much work has been done so far on the informal sector's role in recycling. In addition to what was mentioned by meeting participants, discussions have been held concerning opportunities and challenges for SMEs when they are faced with adjusting to new policies that regulate products and polymers. The EMG Secretariat will reach out to ITC, inviting them to join the Task Team.
- Other relevant work includes efforts related to maritime safety.

### **Consideration of the draft Terms of Reference**

A draft Terms of Reference was shared with Task Team members in advance of the meeting. Suggested outputs of the Task Team include a mapping of UN system activities in the area of marine litter and microplastics, which would include an analysis of available support to Member States in terms of knowledge, tools, capacity building etc.

WHO suggested that the approach to carrying out the mapping would be described in the ToR. UNEP added that the approach under development for collecting data from governments, major groups and stakeholders, building on the Akvo RSR platform and structure through a survey format, is available as an opportunity for the mapping of UN activities as well. For this tool, however, there will not be much flexibility in terms of modifying the methodology to fit specific UN needs. UNEP will share a description of the methodology with Task Team members, who would then be asked to consider if this methodology should be used in the UN context, or if data should be collected in other ways.

The EMG Secretariat informed that a similar mapping focused on e-waste activities in the UN system, had taken a life cycle approach to describe how the UN system supports Member States in this field of work, and to illustrate where there is more or less activity.

In connection with listing relevant events as an added output to the ToR, opportunities for in-person meetings of the Task Team can be identified.

**Summary of action points**

- The EMG Secretariat will prepare a revised version of the ToR based on comments received.
- A description of the suggested methodology for the mapping exercise will be shared for the Task Team's consideration.
- Based on inputs from Task Team members, the EMG Secretariat will compile an overview of events relevant to the topic of marine litter and microplastics.
- A page on the EMG website dedicated to the Task Team's work will be created
- The EMG Secretariat will reach out to ITC, inviting them to join the Task Team.

**Closure of the meeting**

The EMG Secretariat closed the meeting at 16.05 GVA time.

## Annex I - List of Participants

|    | <b>Participant</b>         | <b>Organization</b> |
|----|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | Amanda Kron                | OHCHR               |
| 2  | Arthur Wyns                | WHO                 |
| 3  | Cristina Colon             | UNICEF              |
| 4  | Janaka De Silva            | IUCN                |
| 5  | Elisabetta Cornago         | OECD                |
| 6  | Heidi Savelli              | UNEP                |
| 7  | Henrik Oksfeldt Enevoldsen | UNESCO              |
| 8  | Kamara Yasuhiko            | ILO                 |
| 9  | Lara Geadah                | ESCWA               |
| 10 | Naomi Nishio               | UNIDO               |
| 11 | Nao Takeuchi               | UN Habitat          |
| 12 | Lev Neretin                | FAO                 |
| 13 | Omar Siddique              | ESCAP               |
| 14 | Peter Swarzenski           | IAEA                |
| 15 | Robert Godoy               | Ramsar              |
| 16 | Tobias Salathe             | Ramsar              |
| 17 | Carole Manceau             | WFP                 |
| 18 | Hossein Fadaei             | EMG Secretariat     |
| 19 | Jannica Pitkanen           | EMG Secretariat     |

Annex II



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**1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Task Team on Marine Litter and Microplastics**

**EMG**  
14.10.2019

GoToMeeting, Thursday, 24.10.2019  
14:30 to 16:00 (Geneva time)

Distribution: Task Team  
Members, EMG focal  
points

Documents:

- Agenda
- Draft Terms of Reference

**Provisional Agenda**

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda
2. Presentation: Entry points for tackling marine litter and microplastics  
*UNEP*
3. Consideration of the draft Terms of Reference  
*Incl. agreement on scope of work, outputs, approach to data collection and timeline*
4. Next steps and meeting
5. Closure of the meeting