

## PLASTICS AT UNEA

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and several global environmental agreements have taken an interest in plastic pollution, especially marine plastic litter and microplastics, 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. This Expert Group met for the second time 3 - 7 December 2018, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Representatives from members of the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) movement are active at the two AHOEEG meetings to start conversations about what a [new convention on plastics could look like](#). More than 90 organizations worldwide have endorsed this proposed four-pillar strategy, which focuses on: coordination and cooperation of existing mechanisms; binding measures to reduce plastic pollution and harmonize legislation; financial support for a new institution and participating developing countries; and technical support to ensure informed, science-based decision-making and avoid false solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

Past Issues of [Progress on Plastics](#)

In this issue:

- Civil Society Aligns
- Plastics are Chemicals
- Groups Report Back: Take a Life Cycle Approach, Limit Plastic Production
- Marine Plastics is an Environmental Justice Issue

## 1 - 2 DEC: CIVIL SOCIETY ALIGNS



*Local wildlife requesting the mic...*

### *Civil Society Calls for New & Better Governance*

On Saturday, [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) members CIEL and EIA, together with WWF and the Norwegian Academy of International Law (NAIL) hosted global civil society organizations in a dialogue on the details of the plastic problem and how to address it through international governance.

The meeting opened with three excellent presentations. Karen Baird from the BirdLife

# Progress on Plastics Update

## Issue 7

Marine Programme presented on the impacts of plastic pollution on birdlife in the South Pacific, followed by Dr Chris Sherrington of Eunomia, who talked about land based sources of plastic pollution and different national level policy options to address them. Finally, Kristine Berg of Tomra Systems connected the audience with a compelling and emotional story of the harmful impacts on birds and whales she witnessed as part of the [EXXpedition North Pacific crew](#) earlier this summer.

“It was clear from the presentations and discussion that all evidence-based studies and analyses on plastic pollution show the need to develop a new governance instrument,” said CIEL Senior Attorney David Azoulay. “So far, the opposition to developing a new instrument seems to rely mostly on reluctance to make commitments and engage in multilateralism.”

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### *Major Groups: Most are Aligned*

On Sunday, the Stakeholder Forum facilitated a meeting of the Major Groups & Stakeholders participating in the UNEA Plastics process, including NGOs, industry trade group representatives, labor unions, and other interested stakeholders.

The forum allowed participating members to get more aligned on the expert information and messaging important to reinforce at this global meeting, namely:

- The crisis of [plastic pollution needs to be urgently addressed](#), even as we push for negotiating of a binding international convention.
- Discussion of governance structures should take a [life cycle approach](#) in

their consideration of plastics, including the many adverse health impacts (see p for insert on health).

- [Recycling is not enough](#) to address the current onslaught of plastics - and particularly not adequate to address the predicted [33% increase in production in the next 5 years](#).

“In order to address marine litter and microplastics, we must be able to measure plastics production, trade, consumption, disposal, and recycling,” said Tim Grabiell, senior lawyer with EIA. “Essentially, we must also have full transparency on the additives used in plastics and plastic products.” Without information on all additives and chemicals on plastics, many major groups agreed, circular economy solutions that include recycling continue to be risky.

Additionally, most Major Group members agreed that solutions to microplastics in the air, land, and marine environments will need to expand far beyond “waste”, as the [top sources of microplastics](#) - including tire wear, textiles, and pre-production pellets - rarely interact with a waste management system and are a pervasive problem for human health and the marine ecosystem.

### *Industry Defends Status Quo*

Significant resistance to coordinated international action came unsurprisingly from Business & Industry, including representatives from American Chemistry Council, United States International Business Council, and World Plastics Council, who made clear that their given mandate is to resist any kind of international governance on plastics.

## PLASTICS ARE CHEMICALS

The International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) presented in a technical briefing on 4 December on recent research outlining the presence and dangers of toxic additives to plastic in the production, recycling, and waste.

*Toxic additives are part of the plastic production process.*

[Persistent Organic Pollutants](#) (POPs) in plastics, like flame retardant DecaBDE, are listed to the Stockholm Convention. Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) like bisphenols and phthalates have no global regulation mechanism.

*Toxins persist through the plastic recycling process.*

When toxic POPs, EDCs, and chemicals of concern like dioxin are in the original plastic products, they also [persist through the recycling process](#) - including [into children's toys](#) and food packaging.

*Toxins from waste management end up in our food.*

POPs recycling is occurring on a large scale through the redistribution of dioxin-saturated fly ash for use in consumer products - [including as a food additive and fertilizer in the food chain](#).



*How are the additives toxic?*

EDCs [disrupt your body's normal hormonal processes](#) and can lead to reproductive problems, early puberty, neurobehavioral disorders, and even cancers. POPs accumulate in the body tissues of wildlife and people, [causing disease and disability](#) to humans and disrupting sensitive ecosystems in the environment.

*Toxins are accumulating at alarming rates.*

Plastics are released into the marine environment from dumping, consumer markets that do not match local waste management systems, and production spillage. Microplastics have even more varied sources - from primary sources like personal care product and pellets and flake lost at production facilities to secondary sources like textiles, tires, city dust, and other larger plastics. As these complicated plastics accumulate and contaminate our marine and food systems, [so do POPs, EDCs, related chemicals, and additives](#) like BPA and phthalates.

### 3 - 4 DEC: FIRST DAYS OF 2ND MEETING AHOEEG

#### *Meeting Structure*

This Expert Group meeting has been more informal and already more productive compared to the [first AHOEEG meeting](#) in May. On the first two days, Member States, experts, and Major Groups broke into multiple groups to discuss the framing questions around options for [Monitoring & Information](#) and [Governance](#).

These small groups lent themselves to lively conversations, leading in some instances to frank and insightful discussions on solutions to the urgent problem of plastic pollution.



*Working toward shared ideas...*

#### *Groups Report Back: Take a Life Cycle Approach, Limit Plastic Production*

Not surprisingly, by the end of the third day of discussion, there was no consensus among all participating experts and member states about how to solve the plastic pollution and marine litter crisis. But there were key moments of agreement and understanding.

Strong agreement was clear that a life cycle approach to plastics will be required in the solutions and discussions on new governance, in order to address the sources of microplastics and the impacts of plastic that cannot be solved through waste management alone.

The Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) was frequently mentioned as a potential coordinating mechanism for global action. But when pressed during impromptu presentations in some groups, the lead staff of the GPML made clear that the reason it hasn't made significant strides on the plastic crisis in its 25 years of existence is because [it does not have a mandate to restrict plastic production](#).

Some country representatives highlighted that waste incineration is a problem within their borders and is not a viable solution.

Many member states spoke on the root causes of the plastic pollution crisis - [notably, plastic production and overpackaging](#) - and the need for extended producer responsibility and product redesign to solve the problem.

In sum, messages heard from Member States reinforced that any governance solutions to the marine plastic pollution and microplastics problem must be done urgently and should include a full life cycle approach to plastics, corporate responsibility measures, and real preventative solutions that are not themselves toxic. There was also strong support for coordination mechanisms and data sharing, and some member states

## Progress on Plastics Update Issue 7

even strongly called for binding international governance on plastic.

"I am still looking forward to future meetings when we can go deeper into the discussion of governance solutions," said

Surfrider Foundation Europe's EU Affairs Officer Justine Maillot. "But I'm encouraged to hear from these participants the need to [resist false solutions](#) and to act with urgency to solve the plastic pollution crisis.

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### 4 DEC: MARINE PLASTIC IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUE

On Tuesday, UN Environment hosted a technical briefing side event on the environmental justice impacts of plastic pollution. The panel conversation opened with a recorded message from David Boyd, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, who articulated that plastic pollution is clearly a human rights concern, and that corporations have responsibility for its harmful impacts: "We could go a long way in solving the plastic problem if responsibility for waste and packaging was taken off of governments and put onto industry and producers, where it belongs."



Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš, founder and director of [Azul](#) in California, United States, spoke on the voices of communities of color which are frequently excluded and even intentionally misrepresented in conversations about plastic pollution prevention. "When California first passed a fee on plastic bags, bag litter [fell by more than 72%](#). That, and the eventual total ban on plastic bags in California, happened because of months of campaigning and organizing by communities of color in the state."

Griffins Ochieng from the [Center for Environmental Justice and Development](#) in Nairobi, Kenya reiterated the strength that communities harmed by plastic pollution and marine plastic pollution have: "When communities see enough injustice, they will rise up and take action."

An excellent question for the panel came from Alejandra Parra of [Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales](#), Chile, a member of the [Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives](#): "¿Piensan los integrantes del panel que la toma de medidas blandas ayudará a estas comunidades de los países colonizados, y que la elección de estas medidas responde a la protección de esas comunidades? ¿O en realidad las medidas blandas se adoptan para proteger a la industria?" Ms. Graudiņš made clear that the framing of "poor communities do not care about marine pollution" is both untrue and offensive. Baskut Tuncak, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances, highlighted the lack of civil society in many countries, calling for a "better model" to address the problem more holistically.



# Progress on Plastics Update

## Issue 7

### Defining Urgency

It likely took you 10 - 15 minutes to read this newsletter. It took us nearly 500 minutes to write and publish it.

If you're a fast reader, 950 tons of plastic were released into the ocean while you read this newsletter. Another 4,750 tons were lost while we put it together for you.

That number is still less than 5% of the plastic produced each year. Many more thousands of tons of plastic are dumped into landfills or recycled through toxic systems each minute of each day - and [that number is growing exponentially, with a 33% increase planned in just the next 5 years.](#)

We need to take action to solve this problem now.

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### Upcoming Events

6-13 DEC 2018

[COP24](#)

*Katowice, Poland*

11-15 MAR 2019

[UNEA4](#)

*Nairobi, Kenya*

### Partners in Progress on Plastics Update



**#break  
free  
from  
plastic**

*#BreakFreeFromPlastic is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in September 2016, over 1,400 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. Sign up at [www.breakfreefromplastic.org](http://www.breakfreefromplastic.org).*

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