

## PLASTICS AT UNEA

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and several global environmental instruments 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, The UN Environment Program (UNEP) 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 and broader civil society were 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 implementing activities, in particular for developing countries; and technical support to ensure informed, science-based decision-making and avoid false solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

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## 6 - 7 DEC: MEMBER STATES DISCUSS GOVERNANCE, INFO COLLECTION

*Expert Group Agrees on Options and Principles: Full Life Cycle Approach, Consideration of Global Coordination & Governance*

The Expert Group was tasked with analyzing the barriers and options for combatting marine litter and microplastics. After two meetings and many days of discussion involving Member States, active civil society from across the world, and industry representatives, the Expert Group

[highlighted for UNEA4 the following options for work:](#)

- Consider the full life cycle of plastics in a holistic, evidence-based approach for eliminating marine plastic pollution.
- Act urgently, as the explosion in new plastic production - with [another 33% increase in the works](#) - has already eclipsed our capacity to [recycle and manage it](#).
- Focus on prevention.
- Take into account SDG 14.1 in addition to 12.4 (sound

management of chemicals) - affirming that plastics are chemicals and should be managed as such.

- Evaluate approaches to extended producer responsibility to address the industry's partial financial responsibility for plastics and its impacts on the marine environment.
- Consider the establishment of a global knowledge hub to share standard science and methodologies (including citizen science), information on additives, and national inventory information on plastic production.
- Consider the feasibility of a global legally binding instrument.

Several [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) and IPEN members also supported inclusion of SDG 3.9, on the prevention of illness from chemicals, but one Member State resisted. "Chemicals are surrounding all humans in our daily lives," said Semia Gharbi of the IPEN Regional Hub for the Middle East and North Africa. "The absence of evidence of impacts on human health doesn't mean the absence of risk. Current multilateral environmental agreements related to POPs and other chemicals do not include all hazards or plastic additives, and our international agreements must embody the precautionary principle to address plastics."

The Group further discussed options for increased coordination mechanisms and expanded scope for existing global agreements, like the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) and Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), emphasizing the significant overlap between plastics and chemicals management.

The GPML is a voluntary partnership framework [under the GPA](#), which has proven before to be an effective space to focus a conversation in advance of creating an international convention - as happened with persistent organic pollutants (POPs) under the Stockholm Convention and mercury under the Minamata Convention. GPA staff have previously highlighted the shortcomings of that programme alone to address marine plastic pollution, though a more coordinated and meaningful mechanism could be built beyond the existing structure of the GPA.

The Expert Group further outlined options to establish an interim coordinating structure to ensure effective follow up the outcomes of UNEA4 on marine litter and microplastics.

Several proposed governance structures were presented to the Expert Group plenary, by Norway, Sweden, and some civil society groups (including several members of [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#)). Those structures can be found in [the annex to the summary note from the Expert Group discussion](#). Many members of the NGO and Women Major Groups manifested eagerness to continue the discussion on governance at UNEA4, highlighting the [4-pillar proposed structure](#) proposed by CIEL, EIA, and their partners and endorsed by more than 90 organizations so far.

[#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) members spent much of the week coordinating support among Member States in key regions. The salience of the messaging to consider the full life-cycle impacts of marine plastic litter including those on health were very evident in the statements and interventions made

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by Member States during the plenary discussion of options. As this process moves toward UNEA4, support for a binding global instrument and coordinating mechanism will be especially important among countries in these regions, as they represent both existing and new markets for the single-use and plastic products that constitute a large part of marine litter and eventually microplastics.

A new resolution defining future work at the global level is expected to be adopted at UNEA4 in March 2019. Regardless of the outcomes of UNEA4, however, the Expert Group acknowledged the need to continue progress on urgent national and regional activities in the near term to curb plastic pollution, recognizing the options and priorities outlined by UNEA2 and UNEA3.

### Upcoming Events

6-13 DEC 2018

[COP24](#)

*Katowice, Poland*

10-13 DEC 2018

[2nd Basel Annex EWG Meeting](#)

*Buenos Aires, Argentina*

11-15 MAR 2019

[UNEA4](#)

*Nairobi, Kenya*

2-4 APR 2019

[4th SAICM OEWG Meeting](#)

*Montevideo, Uruguay*

29 APR - 10 MAY 2019

[BRS COP](#)

*Geneva, Switzerland*

### 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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