

Australia's input on possible outcomes of the Assembly (UNEA4)

Australia believes waste, and specific ways and ideas to handle and combat waste, are essential to be included in UNEA4. Generally, UNEA4 should recognise that opportunities for innovative partnerships between government and industry will play a role in transitioning to more sustainable consumption and production. This should include investment in technology to reduce, reuse or recycle waste.

Australia has specific examples in this space and is happy to contribute to the discussion. For example:

- In November 2017 the Australian Government launched the National Food Waste Strategy. The strategy establishes a framework for halving Australia's food waste by 2030.
- On 27 April 2018 Australia's Commonwealth and State Environment Ministers agreed to a range of measures to reduce the amount of waste generated in Australia, increase recycling capacity and increase the demand for recycled product. Ministers also agreed to bring forward an update of the *National Waste Policy: Less Waste, More Resources*, an initiative which includes circular economy principles.
- A number of Australian States and Territories have introduced, or are planning to introduce, container deposit schemes.

1. Possible elements and key messages that could be used as building blocks for the Ministerial Declaration

Australia believes the ministerial declaration should include a reference to the progress made on the programme of work of the open-ended ad hoc expert group on marine litter and microplastics (Para 9c in Resolution 3/7 Marine litter and microplastics).

Combining UNEA4 theme and our desired focus on marine litter, we also believe the ministerial declaration could note the role of sustainable production and consumption in combatting marine litter and microplastics (i.e. prevention, reduction, recycling and re-use will help to reduce the amount of plastic leaking into the marine environment).

Australia recognises that sustainable consumption and production will rely on behavioural change by industry and consumers. Sustainable solutions must be made as easy and attractive as possible for individuals and businesses. Applying tools such as user centred design and behavioural economics could bolster understanding of potential barriers, incentives and motivations to design choice architecture that encourages sustainable practices.

Additional issues Australia believes should be included in the declaration are:

- The role of the circular economy in creating sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- The need for a collaborative approach by governments, industry and consumers;
- The importance of understanding global, national and local markets, barriers (such as infrastructure, regulation and standards) and opportunities;
- Encourage innovation in problem solving;
- The role of public-private partnerships and innovative financing;

- The role of behavioural science in increasing compliance with environmental regulation.

2. Possible elements for an Implementation Plan against pollution, building on the outcomes of the Third Session of the Environment Assembly

Australia considers marine plastic to be a priority area, which will require international collaboration across public and private sectors in areas such as industrial production and transportation, commercial manufacturing, local government waste management, and commercial packaging (especially of beverages). Australia believes there is wide scope in this space for the innovative application of behavioural science approaches such as user journey mapping, nudge-based communications, and user-centred design of sustainable alternatives.

We note the numerous initiatives globally focussing on phasing out microbeads and single use plastics are important and should be encouraged. At the same time, we need to be aware these initiatives will not address the root cause of the problem – the amount of plastic entering the supply chain. As such, partnerships with industry to reduce the amount of plastic entering the supply chain will be critical.

In terms of partnerships, it worth noting that the Australian Government works with other governments to address the issue of ocean pollution and is happy to share its experience in creating partnerships. For example, the Government has developed the *Threat Abatement Plan for the Impacts of Marine Debris on Vertebrate Marine Life*. The plan provides for a coordinated national approach to the implementation of measures to prevent and mitigate the impacts of harmful marine debris on vertebrate marine life. It complements actions to address litter at its source, by reducing waste, increasing recycling and building industry partnerships.

Australian Environment ministers agreed to impose regulations to cut the use of microbeads in cosmetic and health care products unless industry took action to do so by mid-2018. Industry are on track to achieve this with 94 per cent of wash-off products. The remaining 6 per cent are mostly wipe-off products and less likely to enter the marine environment. Work continues with industry to target these wipe-off products too, in line with international practices.

3. Strategic partnerships and initiatives at national, regional and international levels with a multiplying effect and impact

Australia believes governments at all levels could benefit from partnering with behavioural and user-centred design experts to address these complex issues from a non-traditional perspective. While these will not always be the most effective or appropriate methods, they should become part of a toolbox available for use by governments. Additionally, sharing of results from trials and intervention implementation that is rigorously vetted and specific to public policy development could increase the impact of behaviourally informed solutions within the complex environmental space.

4. Identification of strategic innovative solutions for environmental challenges that could have far-reaching positive impacts if implemented globally

Referring to strategic innovative solutions for environmental challenges, Australia wishes to highlight the importance of the following issues:

- Global standards or best practice guides, for example, packaging standards, quality standards for recycle, and safe applications of recycled products;
- Information sharing platform;

- Exploration of a global (as opposed to a range of local) circular economy model; and
- The role of behavioural science and behavioural economics in generating solutions to improve environmental outcomes, including the use of behavioural science-based interventions like nudges in strategic planning.