

Committee of Permanent Representatives  
Subcommittee Meeting  
Thursday 23 January 2020  
9:00 am – 12:00 pm, 1:30 – 4:30 pm  
United Nations Office of Nairobi  
Conference Room 4

### **Background Document for Agenda Item 5**

#### **The Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities: proposed way forward**

This note serves as a background document for consideration of Agenda Item 5: The Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities: proposed way forward.

Consideration of this agenda item is also relevant to the implementation of UNEA resolution 4/11 entitled “Protection of the marine environment from land-based activities”.

Following several rounds of consultations with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, initiated in February 2019, the document provides an update on the guidance received and presents options on the way forward.

Member States are invited to consider the report and provide feedback to the Secretariat, in particular with regard to the proposed way forward.

# THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT FROM LAND-BASED ACTIVITIES: PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

## Background

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR 4) of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA) held in Bali, Indonesia, 31 October - 1 November 2018, the representatives of Governments and the European Union adopted the Bali Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/6) and agreed to work on the function, form, implication, and future of the IGRs, as well as on the work coordinated by the GPA. (See both the meeting report as well as the Bali Declaration on the IGR 4 portal: <https://papersmart.unon.org/igr-meeting/working-docs>).

In line with the integration of the activities implemented by the GPA within the UNEP's Programme of Work, a new project entitled "Protecting the Marine Environment from Land-Based Pollution through Strengthened Coordination of Global Action" was launched in January 2019, building on past achievements of the GPA and designed to continue the work to counter land-based pollution. Some highlights of recent GPA accomplishments are described in [Annex 1](#).

On 27 February 2019, UNEP presented an analysis of options and alternatives for the overall programme and its associated coordinating mechanism to the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR). Consultations with member States also took place in March 2019 in the margins of the Open-Ended meeting of the CPR, followed by informal consultations with representatives of the regional groups in Nairobi. Informal feedback was also received from government representatives during meetings organized by the Regional Seas Programmes, including the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Cartagena Convention in Roatán, Honduras, in June 2019; the 24<sup>th</sup> Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia organized in Bali, Indonesia, in June 2019; the Bureau and the Plenipotentiaries Meetings organized by the Abidjan Convention in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in July 2019; the meeting organized by the Noumea Convention in August 2019; and the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention held in Naples, Italy, in December 2019. These informal consultations have contributed to establishing an emerging consensus on the future of the Global Programme of Action.

In summary, these consultations demonstrate that Member States recognize the historical value and the vital importance of the Global Programme of Action in addressing land-based pollution, including the continued relevance and importance of its three pillars, namely marine litter, nutrient management, and wastewater. However, it is also recognized that the current governance structure of the Programme, particularly the Intergovernmental Review Meetings, no longer serves their purpose. Hence, a revision of the governance architecture of the Programme is called for.

## Proposed way forward

Based on the extensive consultations with Member States, the Secretariat proposes the following:

- The work of the GPA should continue to be mainstreamed under the Programme of Work of UNEP, specifically under Chemicals, Waste, and Air Pollution Quality Sub-Programme. The

Programme is also a key component of the Implementation Plan “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”, which was adopted at UNEA-4 in March 2019;

- Consistent with the UNEA directives, the Secretariat will continue to proactively support the global partnerships linked the Global Programme of Action, namely: (i) the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management, (ii) the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, and (iii) the Global Wastewater Initiative, as well as other relevant partnerships that may be established in future;
- The Intergovernmental Review Meetings should be discontinued. Member States may decide to convene regular meetings (possibly every second year), subject to further consideration and a possible decision by the UN Environment Assembly. This may take the form of Scientific and Technical Meetings, with the aim to bring together technical experts to discuss emerging topics related to addressing land-based pollution.

### **Roadmap for the process leading to the decision on the future of the Global Programme of Action**

The Global Programme of Action is governed by Member States that have agreed to implement its provisions. The Programme was endorsed through General Assembly resolution 51/189 of 16 December 1996, whereby the Assembly endorsed the Washington Declaration and the Global Programme of Action. On this basis, the Programme is an intergovernmental arrangement with autonomous decision-making processes, which is distinct and independent from the UN system. Because of the independent nature of the Programme, any change in the institutional setup or in the formal programmatic linkages with the UN system in support of the implementation of the Programme require both a general decision by Member States calling upon relevant parts of the UN system to take action, and the endorsement of the governing bodies of relevant UN organizations to agree to take such action.

In order to reach a final decision on the future of the Global Programme of Action, the Secretariat proposes the following roadmap:

- The CPR will consider the future of the GPA as a dedicated agenda item at additional sub-committee meetings as necessary during the first half of 2020 (March-June 2020);
- The matter will be considered at the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Annual Subcommittee in October 2020.
- An intergovernmental meeting of Member States under the GPA will be organized to prepare for a final decision. The following options, with limited financial consequences, could be considered:
  - A one-hour session on the margins of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group Meeting on Marine Litter and Microplastics (October/November 2020);
  - A one-hour session on the margins of the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (February 2021);
  - A one-hour session on the margins of UNEA-5 (February 2021).
- The decision adopted at the intergovernmental meeting will be presented to UNEA-5 in the form of a resolution for adoption (February 2021).

- The UNEA-5 resolution will be submitted to the UN General Assembly for possible endorsement at the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly in 2021.

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## **Annex: highlights of recent accomplishments of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities**

On **marine litter**, the GPA has been working to advance progress in tackling the issue of marine litter and microplastics through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) and various activities including the development and implementation of marine litter action plans, knowledge generation including, e.g., Guidelines for the Development of Marine Litter Action Plans; and capacity building through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Also, in-person Training of Trainers (ToT) courses for monitoring and assessment of marine litter and microplastics as well as masterclasses were organized, and guidelines for single-use plastics, etc. developed. The GPA is supporting the implementation of the UNEA resolutions, including facilitating the development of an assessment of sources, pathways, and hazards of marine litter as well as the organization of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group meetings on marine litter and microplastics. A white paper for a global monitoring platform for marine litter is being developed in partnership with the GEO Blue Planet Network.

On **nutrient management**, the GPA Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM) in collaboration with the GEF International Nitrogen Management System (INMS), launched a global campaign on Sustainable Nitrogen Management – “*Nitrogen for Life*” - to raise high-level awareness of the global nitrogen challenge. As part of this launch, a Multi-Actor Dialogue was convened, which resulted in the adoption of the *Colombo Declaration on Sustainable Nitrogen Management*. National Focal Points have been nominated for a Working Group to oversee implementation of the UNEA-4 resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management, which includes the finalization of a Roadmap toward the establishment of the Interconvention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism (INCOM). Within the framework of the GPNM, the Phosphorus Task Team is finalizing a global report “*Our Phosphorus Future*,” which aims to provide scientific consensus from the global scientific phosphorus community on enabling sustainable phosphorus use and security.

On **wastewater**, the GPA, through the Global Wastewater Initiative (GW<sup>2</sup>I), is stepping up efforts to work together with the private sector. A Wastewater Fund and Facility have been planned, which shall leverage additional funding to address the challenges posed by unsustainable wastewater management. The GPA is also finalizing the *Sanitation and Wastewater Atlas of Africa*, a product that will describe the current trends and challenges of wastewater management across the African continent for the benefit of decision-makers. Guidelines and tools have been developed to support countries to address and reduce the discharge of wastewater into the environment. Capacity building, awareness-raising, and education activities have been undertaken through a series of webinars and a Massive Open Online Course.