

Pre-meetings of the “Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution”
Supporting documentation on the thematic workstreams 27-28 May 2021

Workstream: Common goal/vision and objectives of a potential global instrument
Co-facilitators: Pernilla Åhrlin (Sweden) and Dr. Ayub Macharia (Kenya)

What is the problem to be addressed:

- Countries agreed in UNEA resolution 4/6¹, that addressing marine litter was an urgent issue, with paragraph 1 calling upon Member States and other actors at the local, national, regional and international levels, including in the private sector, civil society and academia, to address the problem of marine litter and microplastics, prioritizing a whole-life-cycle approach and resource efficiency, building on existing initiatives and instruments.
- The AHEG Chair’s summary highlighted that “*marine plastic litter was not the primary objective of any international legal instrument and that the current governance strategies and approaches were fragmented and did not adequately address the global issue of marine plastic litter and microplastics*”².

What is the current status:

- Marine litter and plastics can be found in increasing volumes in marine and coast ecosystems and it’s physico-chemical impacts on marine life underline the need to take concerted and accelerated action at all levels. Under current conditions, the most recent scenarios project that annual ocean plastic pollution will triple by 2040³.
- The AHEG Chairs summary identified potential options, including a new global instrument:
 - “*This option may require intergovernmental negotiating process, such as establishing an Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee, aimed to frame and coordinate such new global instrument*”⁴.
- Consensus at UNEA 5.2 on continued work is much needed to enable further actions.

How to address the workstream:

- On a global common vision, the AHEG Chair’s summary highlighted “*Setting new and or sharing an existing long-term vision and objective toward elimination of all discharge of plastic into the ocean. Some examples of noting a shared vision include: SDG 14.1 (until 2025), G20 Osaka Blue Ocean Vision (until 2050), the Ocean Plastics Charter (until 2040) and UNEA Resolution 3/7 on the long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the ocean and avoidance of detriment to marine ecosystems*”⁵.

¹ [UNEP/EA.4/Res.6](#) Marine plastic litter and microplastics

² AHEG Chair’s summary, paragraph 4.

³ The Pew Charitable Trusts and SYSTEMIQ (2020). Breaking the Plastics Wave: A Comprehensive Assessment of Pathways towards Stopping Ocean Plastic Pollution.

⁴ AHEG [Chair’s summary](#) of the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session, paragraph 22 (g).

⁵ AHEG Chair’s summary, paragraph 22 (a).

- The AHEG Chair’s summary further highlighted that “*Numerous participants expressed their view that the AHEG should recommend starting negotiations on a global agreement (either legally binding or voluntary)*”⁶.
- Discussions under this workstream offer an opportunity to hear from participants on their thoughts for the common vision/goal and objectives of a potential global instrument to address marine litter and plastic pollution. This could include addressing existing gaps, the need for intermediate targets to ensure both short-term and long-term progress, consideration of principles such a precautionary approach, and life-cycle measures.

Guiding questions:

- What would be the key common goal/vision and objective for a potential global instrument to address marine litter and plastic pollution?
- What would be the scope of a potential global instrument to solve the problem of marine litter and plastic pollution, and the timescale for negotiating such an instrument?
- In order to achieve this, what is a desired outcome of UNEA 5.2?

⁶ AHEG Chair’s summary, paragraph 23.

Workstream: Data, monitoring, and reporting

Co-facilitators: Vladimir Lenev (Russia) and Nanette Laure (Seychelles)

What is the problem to be addressed:

- The UN Environment Assembly resolutions on marine plastic and microplastics (1/6, 2/11, 3/7 and 4/6) have highlighted the need for harmonizing data and monitoring. There is an urgent need to generate consistent quantitative, baseline data on the sources, abundance, distribution and fate of litter and plastic waste in the environment. Overall, there continues to be issues with regard to collection of data, harmonization and standardization and regular updates of the state of knowledge.
- Data quality and effective monitoring of land- and sea-based sources and the quantities, pathways, fate and impact of marine litter as well as across the entire value chain are all crucial for an evidence-based approach to decision-making. Even if data and information is available, there is a lack of harmonization of methodologies and methods which leads to a lack of comparable data.
- In considering a potential global instrument, reporting on progress on a commonly agreed goal/vision should also be taken into account. This is also relevant for discussions under the workstream on National and regional cooperation and implementation.

What is the current status:

- There has been a significant increase in the number of studies, citizen science initiatives, technology developments and national monitoring programmes. However, this does not lead to consistent quantitative, baseline data on the sources, abundance, distribution and fate of litter and plastic waste in different environments.
- The AHEG Chair Summary noted to "*Further expand, accumulate and share scientific knowledge on marine litter, especially with regard to monitoring and source inventories and impact assessment in order to facilitate the necessary evidence- based and science-based policy approach to measure the success towards achieving common vision and objectives:*
 - (i) *Develop monitoring technology and systems in order to identify sources and flows of plastics.*
 - (ii) *Standardize/harmonize monitoring and data reporting on the effect of the response measures.*
 - (iii) *Establish an international scientific advisory panel*"⁷.

How to address the workstream:

- Enough scientific knowledge is available; however, additional focus to quantify and measure progress is needed to assess the most efficient and effective strategies to combat marine litter and plastic pollution.
- This could include developing monitoring technology and systems in order to identify sources and flows of plastics, standardize/harmonize monitoring and data reporting on the effect of the response measures.
- Consideration could be given to what type of reporting on progress against overarching goals is useful to inform action.
- This workstream could also consider how a potential global instrument could contribute to the establishment of baselines, identification of trends and provision of a framework for collaboration on scientific and technical aspects.

⁷ AHEG Chair's summary, paragraph 22 (d).

Guiding questions:

- What type of data and monitoring would be useful under a potential global instrument on marine litter and plastic pollution?
- What would a global monitoring system look like, building on existing and potential data flows?
- What kind of reporting would be useful to measure progress of a potential global instrument?
- In order to achieve this, what is a desired outcome of UNEA 5.2?

Workstream: Measures to address marine litter and plastic pollution, including through a life-cycle approach, and dialogue with industry and consumers

Co-facilitators: Asha Challenger (Antigua and Barbuda) and Hugo Schally (EU)

What is the problem to be addressed:

- Leakage of plastics into the environment can happen at all stages of the life-cycle and need to be considered when designing and implementing measures⁸. This leakage can consist of releases of (micro)plastics during production, transport and distribution, product use e.g. abrasion, hazards, littering, mismanagement of plastic waste, and after disposal.
- The AHEG Chair's summary further highlighted that "*Experts further noted the necessity of further actions across the life-cycle required to address marine litter and microplastics in moving forward, including through a circular economy approach*"⁹.
- Furthermore, the AHEG Chair's summary noted that "*Developing national action plans that could cover as far as possible all life cycle stages of plastics from upstream including sustainable production and consumption to downstream including environmentally sound waste management, as the basic framework that grounds countermeasures on marine plastic litter. It is necessary to take into consideration the diverse social, economic and environmental circumstances of each country, in particular for vulnerable countries with limited technical and financial resources and capacities*".¹⁰

What is the current status:

- The following potential options for continued work for consideration were listed in [UNEP/AHEG/4/5](#):
 - Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
 - Polluter pays principle approaches
 - Provision of information on the adverse impacts of products
 - Waste management practices, including in the export and import of recycled waste
 - Product design, durability, reparability and recyclability, including the need for multiple-use (as opposed to single-use) plastic
 - Management of polymers and additives

How to address the workstream:

- This workstream could consider a potential global instrument which could contain legally or voluntary measures to prevent and reduce leakage across the entire life-cycle of plastics.
- Consideration could be given to further explore the range of measures that could be addressed in a potential global instrument, including regulatory as well as market-based and circular approaches across the life-cycle and engagement with industry.

⁸ UNEP 2016 Marine plastic debris and microplastics.

⁹ AHEG Chair's summary, paragraph 10.

¹⁰ AHEG Chair's summary, paragraph 22 (b).

Guiding questions:

- What types of measures, including through a lifecycle approach, should be considered for a potential global instrument to address marine litter and plastic pollution?
- What role can stakeholders, including governments, industry, civil society, etc., play in the various measures and approaches?
- How could a potential global instrument coordinate and collaborate with existing initiatives taking measures to address marine litter and plastic pollution, including through a life-cycle approach, while avoiding duplication of efforts?
- In order to achieve this, what is a desired outcome of UNEA 5.2?