

Report back from INC-4 thematic side event

Theme: Plastic pollution in the marine environment

Wednesday, 24 April, 2024, 13:30-14:45 EDT

Ottawa, Canada

Number of participants: 160 people (of which 59% Female)

Key messages resulting from the event:

- Solutions to plastic pollution should be scientifically sound and based on facts and expertise of scientists (e.g. polymer science) and not on opinions..
- It is particularly important to provide precise definitions of key terms such as plastics and microplastics, as disagreements in their understanding can lead to significant errors.
- Downstream countries are receiving a cumulative plastic load from the upstream. These extra amounts of plastic are creating a serious impact on ecosystems, and put a burden on waste management. Developing countries, should receive dedicated financing and technical assistance to manage efficiently the increasing plastic waste.
- **Plastic pellet loss** is a global challenge. Plastic pellets have been reported all around the world and can originate from land-based pollution and from maritime accidents. Plastic pellets have large impacts on the environment: they are ingested by wildlife, penetrate our terrestrial and marine ecosystems, attract other chemicals, and degrade into smaller plastic particles. They also have socio-economic impacts on tourism, fishing, and aquaculture sectors. Once lost to the environment, plastic pellets are almost impossible to clean up. Plastic pellet pollution is largely preventable if operators are held accountable for chronic loss and spills and required to introduce the right set of mandatory requirements throughout the value chain. All operators irrespective of their size must be required to follow mandatory requirements to prevent plastic pellet loss.
- **Islands** are unfairly burdened by plastic pollution, impacting vulnerable communities and often unique biodiversity. Marine Protected Areas are not protected against pollution – we need action at source to reduce plastics entering the marine environment in the first place. Exploring links between the Global Plastics Treaty and High Seas Treaty/BBNJ is extremely important, as is improving waste management and plastic usage on board vessels. Examples can be drawn from work in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.
- **Indigenous communities**, like those in the Pacific Islands, have deep cultural connections to their environment and wildlife. Their identity and traditions are threatened by plastic pollution, disrupting their way of life, creating livelihood insecurities, and endangering their cultural heritage. High levels of microplastics in seafood present a direct health concern to Island communities, as they consume seafood more than the average person globally. The use of plastics as cooking fuel exacerbate health and environmental risks.
- The current regulatory framework for addressing plastic pollution from fisheries and aquaculture is fragmented. In particular, analysis of existing regulations, both voluntary and binding, has demonstrated that **the most significant policy gaps related to fishing and aquaculture gear is in the upstream phase of the lifecycle, with an absence of a comprehensive sectoral strategy at the global level.** A lifecycle approach is needed to

adequately address this source of plastic pollution, with a specific focus on gear and equipment design criteria and the restriction and phasing out of certain problematic polymers and chemicals, as well as overall plastic reduction.

- Addressing plastic pollution necessitates a shift from policy to actionable initiatives at the local and subnational levels.
- ASEAN Member States have undertaken multiple efforts to combat plastic pollution. Several regional initiatives and national action plans have already been adopted. The **importance of regional cooperation** for effective plastic pollution management was highlighted, stressing the need for countries within regions such as ASEAN to work collaboratively. ERIA and IGES play crucial roles in facilitating these regional collaborations by offering platforms for dialogue and sharing best practices. There is a need for robust, data-driven approaches to enhance the effectiveness of policies aimed at reducing plastic pollution. ERIA and IGES contribute by conducting research and gathering accurate data on pollution sources and impacts which are essential for tailoring effective interventions.

Key policy considerations for the INC process resulting from the event:

- Instead of reducing polymer use, our efforts should focus on developing multidisciplinary scientific strategies for proper design and recycling of plastic products, and responsible governmental regulations. Only the combined efforts of all experts, *including environmental and polymer scientists*, can solve the problem of plastic waste and microplastics. There is an urgent **need for the establishment of an influential interdisciplinary scientific council** to achieve this goal.
- Rivers are major transporters of plastic waste to the marine environment, and interestingly, only a few rivers are accused of high amounts of plastic transportation. A dedicated program of work is proposed, as well as dedicated financing and technical assistance for developing countries.
- **Minimum mandatory requirements should be introduced for the prevention and containment of pellet loss** throughout the supply chain, **both on land and at sea**. All operators irrespective of their size should undergo regular auditing of their practices. When accidents, spills and loss occur, operators should be held accountable and should be required to restore affected ecosystems.
- The recognition of the island context is needed in the Treaty, ensuring that it has sustainable funding mechanisms for binding commitments that allow islands to develop the necessary infrastructure and capacity and capability to deliver on them. Islanders need access to additional support to establish circular economies and to tackle clean up of legacy plastics (although clean up alone is NOT a solution). Indigenous peoples and local communities must have the opportunity to contribute to policy design from the island to regional scale.
- Plastic pollution is not just an environmental issue but also an equity challenge, especially for Indigenous communities. Indigenous people often bear the disproportionate burden of plastic waste, facing challenges in waste management and disposal. Addressing plastic pollution requires a focus on equity, recognizing the upstream origins of the issue in production and extraction processes, and implementing comprehensive solutions that prioritize the well-being of Indigenous communities and their environments.

- There is a clear need to strengthen the existing legal framework and ensure harmonization at the global level. In this regard the negotiations should ensure a focus on **crafting a provision on fisheries and aquaculture gear and equipment** that closes regulatory gaps and captures the necessary interventions throughout the material and product lifecycle – upstream, midstream and in the ‘use’ phase, and downstream. The emphasis should be on legally binding measures that make the products and materials safer and more sustainable and form part of a comprehensive sectoral approach.
- Given the **pivotal role that Local and Subnational Governments** are poised to play in the implementation of the plastic treaty, it is crucial to include their voices in the decision-making process.
- There is a need to **strengthen legal frameworks by implementing EPR** laws and other regulatory measures. The ongoing efforts of ERIA-IGES in forming an EPR working group in ASEAN are instrumental in developing these frameworks to hold producers accountable for the plastic waste generated by their products.

Key knowledge products and resource tools that are currently available to inform negotiators in this process:

- [Local and Subnational Governments Coalition to End Plastic Pollution](#)
- [Plastic Pellet Spill Highlights Huge Pollution Problem in EU, and Beyond | The Pew Charitable Trusts \(pewtrusts.org\)](#)
- [Navigating the U.N. Plastics Agreement: Pew’s Recommendations for a Global Solution | The Pew Charitable Trusts \(pewtrusts.org\)](#)
- [A Global Opportunity to End Plastic Pellet Pollution | Fauna & Flora International \(fauna-flora.org\)](#)
- Scientists' declaration on current approaches to plastics and plastic-containing materials, considering all stages of their life cycle (www.microplastics.pro)
- [Tangled Waters: Equity-based Study of Plastic Pollution Impacts on Indigenous Communities in Fiji.](#)
- [ERIA: Regional Knowledge Centre For Marine Plastic Debris \(rkcmpd-eria.org\)](#) ; [ERIA-IGES: Building Data on the Plastics Value Chain in ASEAN Member States \(iges.or.jp\)](#) ; [IGES: Consolidated Insights: A Recap of Three INC Meetings and future prospects for Asia](#) ; [IGES: G20 Report on Actions against Marine Plastic Litter: Fifth Information Sharing based on the G20 Implementation Framework Towards Osaka Blue Ocean Vision \(g20mpl.org\)](#) The report development was led by the Ministry of the Environment, Japan and G20 Presidency, with the support from IGES.
- [Untangled: The Plastics Treaty’s Critical Role in Tackling Fishing Gear](#)
- [Plastics Treaty Essential Elements: Fishing Gear \(EIA\)](#)
- <https://www.pacificplasticsscienceandsolutions.com/>

Annex I: Agenda

INC-4 side event 1 Plastic pollution in the marine environment

Wednesday, 24 April, 2024, 13:30-14:45 EDT

Venue: Shaw Centre; Asia Pacific Room

Background

In this thematic side event, participants delve into the issue of plastic pollution in marine environment and its relevance for the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, with a specific focus on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

To this end, the side event will feature a rich and diverse panel of representatives from governments, research institutions, and civil society organizations, who will address in depth the impacts of marine plastic pollution at biological and socio-economic levels. Panelists will also try and explore innovative and multi-stakeholder solutions premised on waste management and more fully-encompassing policy frameworks aimed at fostering international and cross-sectoral cooperation.

After opening remarks from government representatives, presentations commence with a focus on the broad impacts and challenges of plastic pollution in the marine environment. The session progresses to delve into specific issues such as plastic spills, regional efforts, and data collection, followed by exploration into the effects on communities. Transitioning towards solutions, the presentations highlight policy recommendations and multi-stakeholder engagement to combat plastic pollution

The event will take place in person only and there will be no interpretation in languages other than English.

Agenda

The side event will be moderated by Dr. Nicola Ferri, Senior Compliance and Institutional Adviser, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO.

Topic	PRESENTERS
Welcoming words	Nicola Ferri, FAO
Presentations (5 min each)	
Scientific challenges of plastic pollution in the marine environment	Professor Sergey Lyulin, Head of laboratory "Theory and Modeling of Polymer Systems" of

	Institute of Macromolecular Compounds Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Federation
Impacts of plastic pollution cross borders	Mohammad Abdul Wadud Chowdhury, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bangladesh
Challenges for SIDS	Anama Solofa, Chair of Alliance of Small Island States, Samoa
Turning the tide on pellet pollution: A case study of the impacts of pellet pollution and the policy solutions	Natacha Tullis, officer, Preventing Ocean Plastics, The Pew Charitable Trusts
Data on plastic pollution in the Galapagos Marine Reserve and building a regional network	Jen Jones, Chief Executive, Galapagos Conservation Trust
Effects on Indigenous Communities in the Pacific	Rufino Varea, Aotearoa Plastic Pollution Alliance
Full lifecycle approach to fishing and aquaculture gear in the context of the treaty	Christina Dixon, Ocean Campaign Leader, Environmental Investigation Agency
From policy to concrete actions: Local and subnational measures to tackle plastic pollution	Ignasi Mateo, Project manager, ICLEI-MedWaves
Plastic Pollution and Initiatives in Asia	Reo Kawamura, Director for Regional Knowledge Centre for Marine Plastic Debris (RKC-MPD), Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)
Q&A with the audience	Moderated by Nicola Ferri