
SEA circular News Pulse-Uniting Insights and Innovations in One Essential Resource

In our mission to tackle plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices across Southeast Asia, SEA circular has been at the forefront of gathering and sharing knowledge, success stories, and best practices. To create a centralized resource for stakeholders, partners, and the broader community, we have consolidated our articles into a single, comprehensive document, categorized into four key outputs. These categories—Market-based Solutions, Strengthening the Scientific Basis, Outreach, and Regional Networking—each represent a critical area of focus in SEA circular's work.

Through this unified resource, readers can explore the full scope of our efforts, from policy advancements to practical, on-the-ground solutions, gaining a cohesive view of how regional collaboration is paving the way for impactful, scalable solutions. Together, these stories reflect the collective drive to make Southeast Asia a leader in circular economy innovations and plastic waste reduction.

Table of Contents

About SEA circular project	4
Purpose of the Document.....	4
Output 1: Market-based solutions towards ‘less plastic wasted’	5
1. From Policy to Practice: Designing Inclusive EPR Schemes for Sustainable Packaging and Plastic Waste Reduction	6
2. Plastic Credits: Understanding the Risks and Opportunities in Addressing Plastic Pollution.....	8
3. Achieving a Circular Plastics Economy through Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).....	18
4. World Oceans Day 2020: Innovation for a sustainable ocean.....	24
5. Plastic use rising in SEA due to COVID-19	26
6. Waste as an opportunity.....	27
7. New WWF report on plastic packaging focuses on EPR solutions	29
8. Strengthening the Informal Sector’s Role in Combatting Plastic Pollution.....	31
9. UNEP’s Regional Meeting Highlights Integration of Informal Waste Sector in ASEAN34	
10. Advancing women’s rights and tackling marine plastic pollution in South-East Asia	37
11. Advancing Women’s Leadership in Sustainable Waste Management: Insights from Vietnam.....	39
12. Empowering the Invisible: Integrating Informal Waste Pickers in SEA’s Circular Economy	41
13. Charting a Sustainable Course: Tackling Plastic Pollution in Asia with a Human Rights-Based Approach	43
Output 2: Strengthening the scientific basis for decision-making.....	51
1. Regional dialogue on ‘Perceptions on plastic waste: A dialogue on the findings of a regional study and the role of businesses in accelerating circularity’	52
2. Building Foundation for a Robust National Marine Litter Monitoring Programme in the South-East Asia.....	58
3. Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes	60
4. COBSEA and National University of Singapore launch database of marine litter research from 13 Asian countries	62

5. Action plan on marine litter is agreed for South-East Asia.....	64
Output 3: Outreach.....	66
1. Turning the tide on ocean plastic.....	67
2. PLASTIK”, a wake up call to end plastic pollution.....	68
3. SEA circular supports hotels in Thailand to reduce plastic waste.....	71
4. #CleanSeas #StayHome challenge	73
5. Plastic Waste Photo Contest.....	76
Output 4: Regional networking.....	79
1. Empowering Regional Collaboration: Addressing Marine Litter in East Asian Seas ...	80
2. Empowering UN Resident Coordinators: Strategies to Combat Plastic Pollution in the Asia Pacific Region	83
3. SEA circular report warns plastic policies lagging behind in South-East Asia	88
4. ASEAN Declaration on Combatting Marine Debris.....	90
5. Collaborative action to end plastic pollution in South-East Asia.....	92
6. Collaboration to combat marine litter in Thailand	97
7. SEA circular advances coordination on marine litter and plastic circular economy initiatives in South-East Asia.....	99

About SEA circular project

The SEA circular project – Reducing marine litter by addressing the management of the plastic value chain in Southeast Asia is implemented by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), with funding support from the Government of Sweden. SEA circular aims to reduce and prevent plastic pollution and its impact by working with governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and international partners. The initiative promotes market-based solutions and enabling policies to transform plastic value-chain management, strengthens the science base for informed decision making, creates outreach and awareness. The project leverages COBSEA's regional mechanism to tackle the transboundary challenge of marine litter in a harmonized manner.

Purpose of the Document

The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive resource that consolidates SEA circular's collected knowledge, insights, and success stories related to plastic pollution reduction efforts across Southeast Asia. By categorizing our articles and case studies into four key outputs, we aim to:

- **Support Stakeholders and Policymakers:** Equip decision-makers, government agencies, and NGOs with actionable insights into policy frameworks, market-based solutions, and scientific approaches to plastic waste management.
- **Showcase Regional Best Practices:** Highlight successful initiatives and collaborations within Southeast Asia, demonstrating the impact of regional partnerships on advancing the circular economy.
- **Promote Knowledge Sharing:** Create an accessible, organized resource for partners, researchers, and the public to learn from diverse experiences and scalable solutions, encouraging a collective commitment to ending plastic pollution.
- **Drive Regional and Global Collaboration:** Foster connections and shared goals within ASEAN, COBSEA, and international platforms, promoting Southeast Asia's leadership role in tackling plastic pollution through innovative, inclusive solutions.

This document serves as a centralized repository for exploring SEA circular's impact across four main outputs and provides a structured pathway for stakeholders to engage with the region's journey toward sustainable, circular practices.

Output 1: Market-based solutions towards 'less plastic wasted'

Overview of Market-Based Solutions

This output focuses on fostering transformative change within the plastic value chain by promoting market-based solutions aimed at achieving plastic neutrality. Through engaging roundtable discussions and collaborative initiatives, SEA circular aims to guide businesses in adopting sustainable practices across their operations.

1. From Policy to Practice: Designing Inclusive EPR Schemes for Sustainable Packaging and Plastic Waste Reduction



Bangkok, 11 October 2024

Bangkok, 17 September 2024 – The SEA circular project organized an in-depth capacity building session on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), specifically focusing on packaging waste management as a crucial aspect of addressing plastic waste challenges. The event brought together 39 participants from 14 countries, including ASEAN member states, to explore the practical implementation of EPR schemes aimed at enhancing plastic waste management efforts in the region. Attendees included representatives from Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs), government officials, members of the informal sector, and various associations, highlighting the collaborative effort needed to address plastic waste challenges.

EPR is a policy approach that shifts the responsibility of waste management from local authorities to producers and importers of packaging. This event aimed to tackle three critical aspects of EPR policies essential for their effective implementation:

Key Principles of EPR for Legislative Development

ASEAN countries are in the process of developing and implementing EPR policies and legislation. The session provided insight for prioritizing key areas for national legislation, helping policymakers navigate the complexities of EPR frameworks. Cambodia and Thailand shared their experiences in introducing mandatory EPR schemes, including setting collection and recycling targets for producers, establishing Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs) and EPR funds, engaging the informal sector, raising public awareness, and developing guidelines and standards.

Role and Responsibility of Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs)

Participants explored the importance of PROs, both voluntary and mandatory, in managing waste operations within EPR schemes. Discussions included the elements required to operationalize EPR effectively across different national contexts and the challenges and opportunities for PROs, including in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, which include legal and regulatory requirements, need for capacity building and training, health and safety, and social inclusion and protection of the informal waste sector.

Just Transition for the Informal Waste Sector

The session focused on integrating, including and recognizing informal waste workers into formal EPR systems. Recommendations were made on legal recognition, fair compensation, health and safety, human rights, and capacity building for informal waste pickers. Emphasis was put on the potential role of PROs and associations of informal waste pickers can play in EPR schemes, as part of the upcoming UNEP report on EPR and a just transition for waste pickers, which was also presented during the event.



The event highlighted the need for inclusive policies that support the informal sector while strengthening waste management systems. Participants emphasized the necessity of transparent EPR schemes and incentive structures that ensure the protection and fair treatment of informal waste workers.

This session marks a significant step forward in regional efforts to implement sustainable waste management practices, paving the way for more robust EPR systems across ASEAN.

2. Plastic Credits: Understanding the Risks and Opportunities in Addressing Plastic Pollution



Bangkok, 12 October 2022

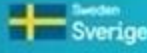
Over 200 participants from government agencies, industries, businesses, start-ups and entrepreneur communities from Bangladesh, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, United States, and the ASEAN countries joined the regional dialogue on 'Plastic Credits – A Circular Solution for Plastic Waste Management' on September 28, 2022.

The United Nations Environment Programme's SEA circular project in collaboration with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Extension organised this event as part of a Regional Dialogue Series by SEA circular. The dialogue had a two-part programme; part I am covering a keynote and information sharing on research findings; and part II covering an engaging panel dialogue on Plastic Credits.

REGIONAL DIALOGUE SERIES



COBSEA



Vincent Aloysius (UNEP)

The event started with the opening remarks by Dr. Vincent Aloysius, SEA circular Programme Officer. He provided the background of the efforts of the SEA circular project to shed light on the market-based solution of plastic credits that is relatively new, evolving and gaining traction in the region. SEA circular supported two research projects – one focused on a situational analysis of plastic credits and its evolution, providing recommendations for further developments; and the other focused specifically on benefits and risks that plastic credit schemes have on the informal waste collectors.

Policy instruments for plastic



During the keynote speech, Ms. Asa Stenmarck from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and Steering Committee Member of SEA circular pointed out that plastic waste management legislation should focus on plastic packaging and design, single-use plastic product, waste legislation, and eco-design. These require a combination of policy tools, local authorities, good municipal, producer, recycling center cooperation and working together. Awareness of the environmental benefits of separate waste collection and recycling plays a significant role in circularity and are part of the extended producer responsibility (EPR).



In part I, Mr. Konstantin Munchau, Yunus Environment Hub, highlighted the study of research work on risks and opportunities of plastic credit financing instruments when introduced into the informal waste management sector. He highlighted risks associated with a voluntary source of funding bringing a huge vulnerability to the informal waste workers and also recognized exclusion of key informal waste management stakeholders due to rigid standardization.



The research conducted by International Solid Waste Associations (ISWA) assessed the contribution of the plastic credit schemes to reducing static pollution and improving recycling. Ms. Aditi Ramola mentioned that plastic credit schemes, a new type of financing instrument, encourage private sector investments in value-chain-based social and environmental improvements. She commented the plastic credit mechanisms could be extremely important in the system of sustainable waste management. However, she highlighted that plastic credits must be implemented in accordance with municipal and national legislation, including extended producer responsibility schemes.



Part II – Key take-aways from the panel discussion are summarized as follows:

In Part II, an engaging panel was moderated by Ms. Ina Ballik, a Sustainability Strategist with 5 panelists with strong experience from across South-East Asia. Ms. Ballik stated that the experience gained from this session would help with the construction of concepts for diving into EPR in our area.

Amongst several interesting discussions, below is a summary of the key questions and related responses during the panel session.

What do we still not comprehend about plastic credits that might promote comprehension and establish trust?



Mr. Pranav Goenka, Senior Commercial Executive Advisor, Singapore, addressed that the mandatory measures in place to promote comprehensive plastic waste management should be distinguished from the voluntary mechanism of plastic credits. Since plastic credits are mostly optional, they may be used as a tool to help close the affordability gap. It is important to consider the standard procedure for industry participants to report their plastic credit purchases, a critical component of building trust and openness in the system. Plastic credits must be included in the entire comprehensive framework for waste management, especially considering a strategy from the demand side that works on all the different components and acts.

How could we take a buyer's perspective on Thai industries and combine short-term, mid-term, and long-term prospect for plastic credits?



Mr. Paradorn Chulajata, Honorary Chairman of Plastic Industry Club, Thailand, emphasized the need for the plastic industry to accept extended producer responsibility (EPR) while still adhering to the supply chain regulations set forth by the government. Plastic credit could be an additional instrument or transitional tool used before EPR becomes legalized requirements in Thailand. Hence, this market-based tool could be used to generate business value for both collectors and buyers. Plastic credit is a bottom-up phenomenon which is different from EPR policies.

What other features may plastic credits offer? What services can the various roles in the mandatory scheme provide?



Barak Ekshtein TONTOTON

Mr. Barak Ekshtein – Founder – TONTOTON, operating in Vietnam and Cambodia, felt significance of using plastic credit scheme is to encourage the collection and the handling of the low-value plastic or post-consumer non-recyclable plastics that collectors do not collect otherwise. The creation of a waste management system can fill in these gaps and cover and collect any kind of waste on the ground level. Hence, the plastic credit program might generate employment prospects at the local level.

What roles do plastic credits play? And how do plastic credits relate to human rights-based approaches, responsible business conduct, the Basel Convention, and EPR policies? What are the inherent limitations of plastic credit schemes?



Mr. Vincent Decap – Co-Founder Zero Plastic Ocean (ZPO), France, highlighted that the plastic credit would only be a short-term instrument and be used to complete the task at hand while Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations are put into place. Plastic credits can add value to plastic waste bought by a business that wants to ensure that plastic is eliminated from the environment. To have a greater and more widespread influence, plastic credits will eventually find a place as a voluntary tool for businesses that choose to focus more on a human rights-based approach.

Where can we see the possibilities for plastic credits when we examine the governmental side from a very special aspect and add your perspective to the conversation?



Mr. Crispian Lao, Commissioner, Private Sector Representative from the Recycling Industry Sector, National Solid Waste Management Commission, Office of the President, the Philippines, highlighted that several private companies have participated in voluntary pilot projects in the Philippines. The projects categorized the waste into rigid and flexible credits that benefit everyone across the waste value chain. Government should develop a uniform standard for how policy makers declare footprint and how stakeholders calculate credits to account for social implications.

Highlights in Closing Statement of the Panel Discussion

- The plastic credit helps reduce environmental consequences on a global scale, and we should all collaborate on this to bring the value chain.
- Plastic credits would be used to close any gaps in the market that deal with issues. For instance, the plastic credits aid market mechanism for the non-recyclable plastic that businesses do not accept.
- Designing appropriate regulations and ecosystems to set the target to reduce ocean plastic pollution using plastic credit system is one of future strategies for countries.
- Plastic credits is a method to measure and offset the amount of footprint that businesses put into the market whether it be rigid or flexible packaging. Using plastic credit is a way to fund the informal system by spending money on credits.

- Plastic credits are viewed as a workable financial mechanism to promote comprehensive waste management. Adoption among a variety of stakeholders is crucial and this can only happen if people have more faith in the system's workings and transparency.

Readers are invited to watch the webinar recording [here](#).

3. Achieving a Circular Plastics Economy through Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)



Bangkok, 12 September 2022

Over 100 participants from government agencies, industries, businesses, start-ups and entrepreneur communities from Bangladesh, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, and the ASEAN countries joined a regional training on Human Rights-Based Approach and a dialogue on Extended Producer Responsibility in Plastic Value Chain on August 23, 2022.

The United Nations Environment Programme's SEA circular project in collaboration with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Extension organised this event as part of a Regional Dialogue Series by SEA circular. The dialogue had a two-part programme; part I covering a keynote and training session on Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA); and part II covering an engaging panel dialogue on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in the plastic value chain.

In the opening remarks, Ms. Kamala Ernest, SEA circular Project Coordinator, emphasized that SEA circular focused to foster market-based solutions and enabling policies to minimize marine plastic pollution. Ms. Ernest mentioned that SEA circular aimed to reduce plastic waste in the South-East Asia region, while human rights and gender equality are its key components.



Ms. Betty Yolanda, Director of Regional Program at Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, Indonesia delivered a keynote speech on Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in the plastic value chain was. She highlighted that the microplastic and macroplastic pollution are poisoning the aquatic and agricultural existence, posing a threat to global food security, and are linked to climate change. She further emphasized, human rights-based approach that prioritizes human rights at the forefront of all policies and practices that strengthen both government and private sectors.



In Part I, Dr. Sara L. Seck from Dalhousie University, Canada, delivered the training on “Human Rights Based Approach in the Plastic Value Chain” to draw a frame for thoughts. Here are the key discussion points from this training –



- The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) supported by the UN Human Rights Council and recognize that businesses have a duty to uphold human rights.
- The significance of right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment which was recognized by UN Human Rights Council in 2021.

- The importance of the plastic life span circular model and the different stages of plastic life cycles to be considered for all potential effects on human rights through all the individual stages.
- The businesses are obligated to uphold human rights, particularly those that are impacted by environmental degradation.
- Links between the six different substantive elements and plastics and these substantive elements are implicated in each stage of the plastics' lifecycles.
- As part of procedural components of the human right-based approach, how to demonstrate that organization is actively assisting in the exercise of procedural rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.
- The importance of the organization's dedication to the early assessment and prevention of effects brought on by plastics.
- What it would require for a company to carry out its obligation to respect human rights in accordance with UNGPs, especially, through the development of a human rights policy, carrying out human rights due diligence, taking the necessary actions to ensure that rights holders have access to remedies for any negative effects on human rights caused by our business related to plastics and ensuring a gender-responsive strategy.

At the end of the training, Dr. Seck responded to audiences' queries and comments related to the case studies she presented and the practicality of life cycle assessment as a vehicle for human rights-based approach. She mentioned that the pilot projects are being carried out in the region will help to identify the key factors influencing integration of human rights in plastic value chains. She also admitted that there may be difficulties applying life cycle approach to create norms for human rights-based practices. However, the life cycle approach helps the stakeholders to develop a clear framework for human rights analysis in the context of plastic value chains.

Please access the training materials [here](#).

In part II, Ms. Czarina Constantino-Panopio, National Lead of No Plastics in Nature Initiative, WWF Philippines, in the keynote speech, discussed how implementing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) calls collaborate and work together on waste management, waste reduction, and obliged business. She talked about how SMES, MSMEs, and major businesses are adopting both voluntary and required EPR rules. She emphasized the importance of the EPR regulatory requirements being linked to reduction targets as well as recovery and waste management targets.



This brief keynote was followed by a panel moderated by Dr. Orathai Pongruktham, Thailand Environment Institute (TEI). The panel was composed of four key contributors: Dr. Wijarn Simachaya, President, Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), Ms. Czarina Constantino-Panopio, WWF – Philippines, Mr. Patinya Silsupadol, Deputy Secretary, General, Federation of Thai Industries (FTI), and Ms. Indah Budiani, Executive Director, Indonesia Business Council for Sustainable Development, took part in this panel discussion.



Dr. Wijarn Simachaya highlighted the need to balance the economy, development, social welfare, environmental effect, and accessible development is one of the main issues when it comes to developing and implementing policies in this discussion. He emphasized the need to create a policy that considers all relevant stakeholders and maximizes the benefits for the development of the country.

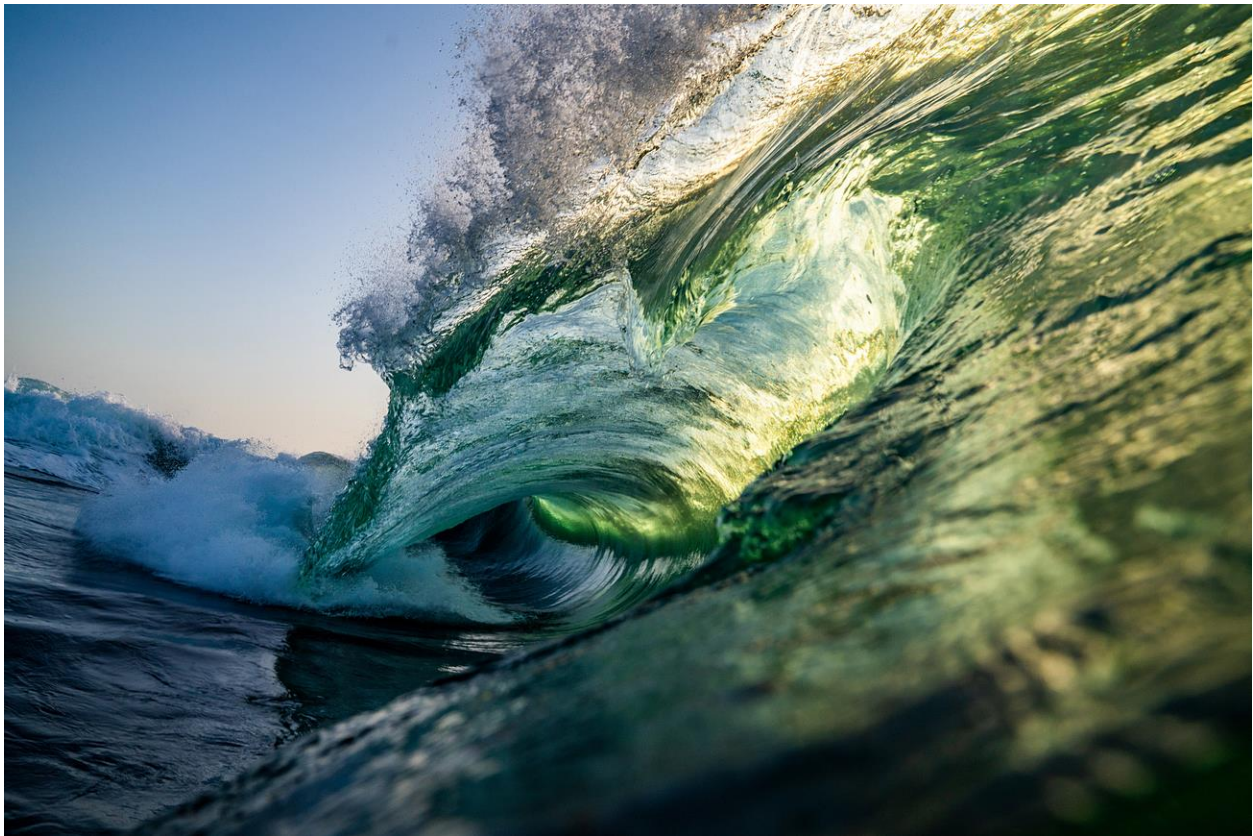
Mr. Patinya Silsupadol highlighted the present scenario of Thailand, “The fragmentation of existing activities carried out by various organizations. Ongoing project fragmentation also leads to data and baseline fragmentation for waste management. However, the private sector is facing the challenges of uncertainty of the EPR fees, the operator’s identity, and the best ways for them to use the money”.

On the other hand, Ms. Indah Budiani highlighted Indonesia’s regulations, known as National Plastic Action Partnership (NPAP), which are remarkably comparable to those of other Asian nations. She said, “It aimed to reduce waste management from the plastic packaging. She also stated that the terminology EPR is not well accepted by the producer they want to change to extended stakeholder responsibility”.

As part of the regional dialogue series, SEA circular will be organizing two more sessions in the coming months on two interesting areas related to circular economy and plastic value chain.

You are invited to watch the webinar recording [here](#).

4. World Oceans Day 2020: Innovation for a sustainable ocean



8 June 2020, Bangkok, Thailand: World Oceans Day 2020 is focusing on 'Innovation for a sustainable ocean'. SEA circular joins this global movement today, looking at how data, technology, market-driven solutions, and scientific research can support more sustainable oceans, and reduce marine plastic pollution.

SEA circular is working to solve plastic pollution at source, targeting the upstream drivers of marine plastic litter, seeking market-based solutions and promoting enabling policies towards a more sustainable ocean environment in South-East Asia.

This region is at the heart of the global marine plastic pollution challenge. It is estimated that five Asian countries – China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam – may account for up to [60 percent](#) of the plastic waste leaking into the Pacific Ocean.

Data, information, and a real understanding scale of the problem of marine plastic pollution faced by consumers and businesses, are crucial first steps to tackle marine plastic waste.

With this in mind, SEA circular has conducted innovative research from Jan-April 2020, together with Food Industry Asia (FIA) targeting consumers and food and beverage

businesses, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The goal was to assess consumer awareness and business incentives around usage and wastage of plastics.

The resulting report is set to be launched later this month. Analysis indicates that these South-East Asian countries are seeking innovations from governments, businesses and citizens, to tackle the plastic pollution crisis in the marine environment of the region.

SEA circular has also recently published a series of Country Reports, compiling and analysing data from nine countries in South-East Asia, and provided in-depth analysis, to understand more about the drivers and actions around plastic wastage and leakage in [Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, China, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam](#).

This SEA circular series outline issues of environmental and biodiversity threats, waste management, leakage throughout the plastic value chain, as well as the policy framework to tackle the issue. Data on components and amounts of plastics collected at coastal clean-ups are compiled – to understand more about the causes and impacts of marine litter at a national level.

SEA circular is also working in partnership with South-East Asian organisations and the private sector, to promote more sustainable production and consumption and associated technological developments, to respond to and address the marine plastic pollution crisis.

At [SEA of Solutions 2019](#), SEA circular welcomed scientists and entrepreneurs, to showcase innovations in research, new technologies and circular business.

SEA circular is also conducting a series of virtual [e-Roundtables](#), bringing together private sector professionals in a joint effort to explore synergies and innovations to tackle the regional marine litter problem together.

The first e-Roundtable focused on the hotel industry and hospitality sector – where plastics are ubiquitous. SEA circular is working to promote innovations towards sustainability through supporting hotels in South-East Asia which are pioneering the field in the drive towards less plastic wasted. Through the SEA circular project, UNEP is working to ensure that the best practices and learnings from these enterprises serve to drive regional industry standards towards less plastic waste.

SEA circular is working at the nexus of innovation with businesses, communities, scientists and governments, towards a more sustainable and plastic free ocean. We invite you to join us in celebrating World Oceans Day 2020 and acknowledge our collective duty to protect the marine environment.

5. Plastic use rising in SEA due to COVID-19



13 April 2020, Bangkok, Thailand: Single-use plastic bags are making a comeback as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

After their use was restricted at the start of the year, plastic bags can once again be seen littering the streets of greater Bangkok as people begin to rely on take-outs and food delivery services to adhere to the government's social distancing guidelines, said director-general of the Pollution Control Department (PCD), Pralong Dumrongthai.

According to the PCD, the volume of plastic waste has increased significantly since March 26, when the government banned restaurants from serving dine-in patrons. "Most of the waste is ready-to-eat food packages, plastic utensils and glass," he said.

According to Dumrongthai, the problem is compounded by the absence of a public campaign to educate people about the importance of sorting their waste.

"People tend to combine their garbage, often mixing food scraps with recyclables, which makes it harder for garbage collectors to sort it out and recycle," he said.

With grocery stores being one of the few places still open during COVID-19 lockdowns, disposable plastic bags are also making a comeback as some people fear that reusable bags could spread the disease. Before the pandemic, a growing number of governments banned single-use plastic bags in an effort to cut down on waste. But as the novel coronavirus has spread around the globe, people are increasingly concerned about coming in close contact with other people and their possessions, including reusable bags.

6. Waste as an opportunity



People in Singapore can now join in the global effort to end plastic waste through a new programme launched in April.

[Clean4Change](#) is a 150-day programme geared to improving recycling knowledge and inspiring and facilitating community clean-ups through a mix of sustained clean-up activities, community events and workshops.

The initiative of the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, an international non-profit based in Singapore, the programme is part of Clean4Change's efforts to support Singapore's Green Plan, the nation's blueprint for sustainable development.

Mr. Jacob Duer, president and chief executive of the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, said at the launch event at the ArtScience Museum last month, "...every clean-up is more than just a clean-up. Picking up and binning a piece of plastic litter is the first step to making sure it enters the waste management cycle, so that it can be processed and recycled. It is a universal activity that anyone can take part in."

Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu, a guest of honour at the event, added that there are multiple issues holding Singapore back from improving recycling

literacy. As a small nation producing a relatively small amount of plastic waste, Singapore lacks the infrastructure to make plastic recycling economically viable for operators. Secondly, the mindset of people here towards recycling needs to change as well. Ms. Fu, added that Singapore is trying to find ways to extract the most it can from its waste. "Increasingly, it's not (about) waste as a problem, but waste as an opportunity," she said.

Recycling is key to reducing the amount of waste per capita per day sent to landfill in Singapore. Additionally, it enables the recovery of a very precious resource and the unlocking of value from plastic waste. Figures, though, from the National Environment Agency show that more than half of Singaporeans engage in recycling but do not have a strong knowledge of what can be recycled or how to recycle efficiently.

In addition to workshops and events, participants in Clean4Change will be given access to educational resources on reducing plastic waste, recycling, and organising their own clean-ups. Mobile app Litterati will be used to log the location and type of litter they spot. The data will be used by the Alliance to plan future initiatives, with the Alliance to End Plastic Waste engaging community groups in that area to tackle the issue. Dr Natalie Hallinger, director of behavioural science at Litterati, the company behind the app, said: "Getting people to relate with a clean-up in their neighbourhood opens the door to helping them understand how to better manage plastic waste." Mr. Duer said the Clean4Change event is aimed at translating concepts such as sustainability in the region into relatable community events.

"I am confident that Singapore will play a leading role and become a 'green bridge' for sustainability solutions not only here, but across the region," added Mr. Duer.

The Alliance intends to engage at least 100 schools, companies and community groups in the island nation.

7. New WWF report on plastic packaging focuses on EPR solutions



17 February 2020, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has released a report detailing the volume of plastic packaging placed on the market by packaging type and application.

The new report, 'Plastic Packaging in Southeast Asia and China', found that in South-East Asia and China, rapid economic growth has led to an immense increase in the use of plastic, especially for packaging consumer goods.

Thomas Schuldt, Regional Coordinator SEA, Plastic Circular Economy for WWF-Malaysia, said "Plastic waste ends up in the environment primarily because of inadequate systems for collecting and treating waste, particularly in the developing world. Segregation of waste is rare, and very little municipal waste is recycled. When recycling does happen, it usually depends on the informal sector, private enterprises or community initiatives."

Waste management systems in the region are proving inadequate. In China and Thailand, for example, only around half the waste is collected, whilst in Malaysia and the Philippines, just 15% is safely disposed of.

Malaysia also ranked the highest among the six countries in terms of annual per capita plastic packaging consumption, at 16.78 kg per person, followed by Thailand at 15.52 kg per person per annum.

The report also looked at the total estimated annual household plastic packaging consumption, which amounted to 523,000 tonnes for Malaysia.

The 'Plastic Packaging in Southeast Asia and China' report looks at the plastic waste of six countries; China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. It focuses on household consumption of plastic packaging, as this is the plastic most likely to end up in the oceans. The data includes plastic packaging consumption among private households, small businesses and other end users such as schools, hospitals and government buildings, but not retail/wholesale or industry.

The report suggests that an effective solution is the application of the extended producer responsibility (EPR) concept. EPR schemes require companies – which place packaged goods on a market – to pay a fee to an independent system operator. This system operator will then use these funds to contract waste management services for segregated collection and recycling, educate consumers to achieve higher waste segregation rates, and sometimes even fund research and development of easier-to-recycle materials.

The report recommends governments to create a regulatory framework for EPR schemes to avoid free-riding of non-compliant companies, whilst allowing the independent system operators sufficient room to detail out a highly-effective EPR scheme.

More than 30 countries have already implemented EPR programmes, and around 400 schemes exist worldwide. Since EPR schemes can help governments address shortfalls in financial resources for waste management which leads to plastic pollution, the report provides an example of an effective solution.

Under the German EPR scheme for packaging, companies pay a fee of around €450 per tonne of plastic packaging they put on the market. Applying this figure to the estimated annual 523,000 tonnes of plastic packaging consumed, Malaysia could stand to raise €235 million (RM 1,077 million) per year, if EPR programmes are successfully implemented.

Tackling the plastic pollution crisis requires governments and companies to work together, with active involvement from consumers. EPR schemes play a crucial role in addressing this problem by providing an ongoing source of financing for collecting and processing waste, as well as encouraging companies to adopt eco-design practices and educating consumers.

8. Strengthening the Informal Sector's Role in Combatting Plastic Pollution



Bangkok, 10 October 2024

26 Sep 2024, Bangkok, Thailand: In a world grappling with the escalating crisis of plastic pollution, the session titled **“Bridging Rights and Responsibilities: Tackling Plastic Pollution Together with the Informal Sector,”** held on September 26, 2024, at the **UN Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, Asia Pacific**, emerged as a pivotal moment for fostering meaningful dialogue on how to ensure a ‘just transition’ in the plastics sector. Organized by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as part of the [SEA circular project](#), this session convened 200 participants from diverse stakeholders to delve into the urgent need for sustainable waste management practices that honor human rights in the Asia-Pacific region.

The event highlighted UNEP’s research on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and its implications for the informal waste sector in six ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This discussion emphasized the necessity of including informal sector workers, such as waste pickers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in environmental decision-making. UNEP has gathered valuable insights from these groups,

and the forthcoming report will provide recommendations for businesses to integrate human rights considerations into their strategies to combat plastic pollution. The session aimed to inspire businesses to adopt a human rights-based approach, fostering a sustainable and equitable future for all.

During the discussion, expert panelists highlighted that waste pickers, who are critical to waste management, often operate in hazardous conditions without legal recognition or adequate protections, making them vulnerable to exploitation.



Salisa (Yam) Traipipitsiriwat, Senior Campaigner/SEA Plastics Project Manager, Environmental Justice Foundation emphasized the importance of incorporating the diverse voices of informal waste workers in policy discussions. One of her key messages was that Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes should not only be aligned with international human rights standards but also be legally binding to ensure accountability and fairness in addressing plastic pollution.

Additionally, **Vivekand Sistla, Head of R&D, Unilever Thailand** discussed the concept of the right to access remedies, emphasizing the need for affected communities to seek justice and compensation for harm caused by plastic pollution.

Key Takeaways from the Event

- 1. Understanding Human Rights Implications:** Plastic pollution poses complex human rights challenges, particularly for informal waste pickers, as it undermines fundamental rights, including the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.
- 2. Integrating Human Rights into Business Strategies:** Practical guidance was provided for businesses to incorporate human rights considerations into operations and EPR schemes, emphasizing the empowerment of informal waste workers.
- 3. Upstream solutions:** Downstream solutions like recycling alone are insufficient; the informal sector must be empowered to contribute to upstream efforts to reduce plastic waste.

4. **Participation in decision-making:** Inclusion and active participation of informal workers in environmental decision-making are crucial, with associations and cooperatives serving as tools to address human rights gaps and achieve EPR targets.
5. **Exploring Access to Remedies:** Ensuring that communities affected by plastic pollution have access to remedies must be integrated into international legal frameworks.
6. **Fostering Collaborative Solutions:** Partnerships among businesses, governments, and civil society are essential for developing comprehensive and effective solutions to the plastic crisis.

The session concluded with a powerful call to action, urging all stakeholders to implement concrete steps toward integrating human rights into plastic pollution management strategies. By acknowledging the vital role of the informal sector and amplifying their voices, we can pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future.

9. UNEP's Regional Meeting Highlights Integration of Informal Waste Sector in ASEAN



Bangkok, 18 July 2024

A recent online regional meeting hosted by UNEP served as a platform to introduce their draft report, “Recognition, Inclusion, and Integration of the Informal Waste and Recycling Sector: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Extended Producer Responsibility in Six ASEAN Countries.” The diverse group of attendees included representatives from the informal waste sector, private industry, NGOs, and academia.

The informal waste sector plays a critical role in ASEAN’s waste collection and recycling yet faces significant challenges. Recognizing and integrating this sector is paramount for improving plastic waste management and fostering inclusive systems that prioritize labor rights, health, equity, and environmental sustainability. Developed under the [SEA circular project](#), the report explores how Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies can be a catalyst for better waste management while ensuring a just transition for the informal sector.



Key Discussions and Insights:

Kamala Ernest, SEA circular project coordinator at UNEP, opened the webinar by outlining the event’s objectives and highlighting the importance of integrating informal waste pickers. She noted, “Globally, around 15-20 million people are engaged in informal waste management. Recognizing and integrating the informal waste sector is essential for enhancing plastic waste management and ensuring a just and inclusive transition.”

Representatives from Ouroboros, Ali Syed and Shiza Aslam, discussed the integration challenges faced by informal waste pickers in ASEAN and highlighted successful strategies from around the world that could be adapted to the region. Francesca Montecvecchi, a Circular Economy expert at UNEP, then introduced the report, providing a detailed overview of the research methodology, key findings, and recommendations for incorporating informal waste pickers into EPR systems using a human rights-based approach.

Participants engaged in a dynamic open discussion, sharing insights and feedback on the report. Participants agreed on the proposed recommendations, meanwhile emphasized the need to prioritize these recommendations, enforce long-term commitments with strict laws, and ensure policy support for successful implementation. Some participants also suggested broadening the survey to include more waste pickers’ opinions.



Photo Credits: Francesca Montecvecchi

Moving Forward

The regional meeting successfully brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the crucial issue of integrating the informal waste sector into formal waste management systems across ASEAN. The valuable insights and feedback gathered will inform the finalization of the report and guide future actions to promote inclusive and sustainable waste management practices throughout the region.

10. Advancing women's rights and tackling marine plastic pollution in South-East Asia



8 March 2020: This International Women's Day, SEA circular is focusing on how plastic pollution and the resulting degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems, threaten women's rights.

The vast increase in marine plastic pollution – particularly in South-East Asia- is disproportionately impacting socially disadvantaged groups, such as women and children in coastal communities, the urban poor and informal waste pickers.

These groups are often uniquely exposed to environmental threats, while facing limited access to social protection and the resources to build resilience. At the same time, it is vital to recognize that women are important agents of change, whose potential to participate in environmental protection often remains untapped.

How does plastic pollution affect women first and worst?

Women make up the majority of informal waste pickers, one of the most vulnerable groups of the urban poor. This means they are more exposed to health hazards and social stigma. They also consistently earn less than male waste pickers who are more frequently involved

in formal employment in the waste sector. Their contributions to the recovery and recycling of valuable plastics are largely overlooked and unsupported.

Coastal fishing communities are heavily impacted by plastic pollution and harmful contamination of seafood. Women living in coastal areas are more likely to rely on small-scale fisheries that depend on healthy marine ecosystems. Women typically concentrate on shell and smaller fish while men catch offshore fish. Women can therefore be more directly exposed to beach litter in the course of their lives.

Women working in the plastics industry are also exposed to specific threats. Plastic production workers can be exposed to an array of chemicals and harmful substances, which may be particularly hazardous to female biological reproductive functions.

Tackling marine plastic pollution with a gender lens

Marine plastic litter must be tackled through a life-cycle approach with careful consideration of gender equality and human rights issues, from plastic production on land and use by consumers, to its disposal and possible leakage into the ocean.

Human rights and gender considerations must be integrated with policies, business plans, processes and decision-making, aimed at tackling the challenge of marine plastic litter.

As major consumers and users of plastic goods, women may be exposed to greater risks, but they can also be champions in combating marine plastic litter and agents of change for responsible consumption and waste disposal practices.

11. Advancing Women's Leadership in Sustainable Waste Management: Insights from Vietnam



Bangkok, 29 March 2024

SEA circular project collaborated with the Vietnam National University (VNU), in facilitating the integration of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) implementation in marine plastic litter management in Vietnam with the role of women in the informal sector, which aimed to amplify women's contributions to waste collection and combat pollution.

Contributing to Vietnam's 'National Action Plan on the Management of Plastic Waste in the Ocean until 2030', the collaboration has bolstered capacity and provided support for the plan's execution through three key activities: i) conducting research on pertinent laws and policies for implementing the National Action Plan; ii) hosting training workshops to advocate for EPR and highlight the role of women in the informal plastic waste treatment sector; and iii) evaluating the feasibility of integrating and enhancing the curriculum content on marine pollution, plastic waste, and management within the Master of Law program. Training workshops were conducted in both Hanoi and Hai Phong cities with the aim of raising awareness among stakeholders.



The project closing event took place in Hai Phong, Vietnam, with enlightening field trips to Tan Vu port and Pha Rung Shipyard to shed light on practical waste management in Vietnam setting. Bringing together a diverse group of 80 participants, including beneficiaries of training workshops, educators, students from various institutions, and representatives from government bodies, businesses, and NGOs, the meeting fostered discussions on sustainable waste management practices and the empowerment of women in the informal waste sector.



The post event evaluation unveiled an impressive 98% surge in awareness regarding the pivotal role of women in the informal sector among participants.

12. Empowering the Invisible: Integrating Informal Waste Pickers in SEA's Circular Economy



Bangkok, 24 January 2024

SEA circular has collaborated with WWF Germany and enlisted the expertise of national and regional professionals in crafting a regional report focused on the integration of informal waste pickers into Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. This comprehensive report aims to explore the potential design and implementation of EPR through a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), with a specific emphasis on enhancing the recognition, inclusion, and integration of the informal waste sector. This sector includes informal waste pickers, waste collectors, recyclers, aggregators, waste picker associations, and other relevant entities.

The report will delve into:

- **Current state of EPR development:** Analyzing existing EPR policies and practices in SEA circular countries (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia) and their impact on the informal waste sector.
- **Crucial role of informal waste pickers:** Highlighting their contributions to plastic waste management and identifying current challenges to their participation in formal systems.
- **Gaps and hurdles:** Recognizing and addressing limitations in current approaches that hinder effective integration of the informal sector.
- **Best practices and recommendations:** Drawing on successful models from around the world to propose concrete steps for integrating the informal sector into EPR schemes through an HRBA lens.

To facilitate knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, workshops and a regional dialogue on this subject will be organized. These events will provide a platform to disseminate the key findings of the report and enhance the capabilities of stakeholders across all SEA circular countries. The anticipated publication date for the report is Q3 2024.

13. Charting a Sustainable Course: Tackling Plastic Pollution in Asia with a Human Rights-Based Approach



Bangkok, 05 October 2023

During the [Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia conference](#), which took place on October 5th, 2023, and was jointly hosted by UNEP and UNDP, a pivotal panel discussion titled ‘Plastic Pollution in Asia: Business Models Integrating a Rights-Based Approach’ occurred at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. This discussion united a diverse group of experts, industry leaders, scholars, and advocates to address the growing issue of plastic pollution in Asia-Pacific and the need to integrate human rights-based approaches within the plastic value chain.

Understanding the Crisis: The Asia-Pacific region faces the dire consequences of the plastics crisis, with an astonishing 12 million metric tons of plastic waste seeping into oceans and rivers yearly. This pollution threatens our environment and impacts human rights across the entire lifecycle of plastics, from extraction and production to transportation, use, and the management of post-consumer plastic waste.

The Role of Human Rights: Human rights, often overlooked in discussions about plastic pollution, are a critical element in addressing this crisis. A holistic approach to tackling plastic pollution involves various stakeholders, particularly businesses. A recent UNEP report outlines the potential to reduce plastic pollution by 80% by 2040 through market shifts emphasizing “reuse, recycling, and diversifying alternatives” in tandem with policy changes.

The Private Sector’s Vital Role: The private sector, especially in emerging and developing economies in Asia, has a pivotal role in combatting plastic pollution. The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) principle, which incentivizes producers to consider environmental factors when designing their products, has emerged as a powerful tool. As businesses transition towards circular practices, they have the potential to institutionalize a human rights-based approach (HRBA) in the plastics value chain, fostering sustainable and inclusive solutions.

Creating a Rights-Based Approach: A rights-based approach, as defined in this context, is the process of designing, promoting, and implementing actions that transition to sustainable consumption and production of plastics. This approach aims to be fair and inclusive, encompassing all stakeholders, including waste pickers and workers in the plastic value chain, to create decent livelihoods and opportunities while leaving no one behind.

In closing this crucial discussion, it is apparent that substantial progress has been made toward a more sustainable and equitable future for the Asia-Pacific region. The insights and expertise provided by our esteemed panelists have sparked a drive for positive change.

Key Outcomes

- **Heightened Awareness:** The event served as a platform to raise awareness about the importance of integrating human rights into the fight against plastic pollution in Asia.
- **Constructive Dialogue:** The panel discussions fostered productive conversations among business leaders, government representatives, and civil society about actionable measures to enhance a rights-based approach throughout the plastic lifecycle.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** The event facilitated networking and collaboration opportunities among stakeholders committed to tackling plastic pollution while respecting human rights.



In her welcoming statement, Ms. Sanna Leino, Program Specialist, Swedish Embassy in Bangkok highlighted that Asia holds the distinction of being both the largest producer and the largest consumer of plastic globally. She emphasized the profound connection between plastic pollution and environmental rights. When we factor in the social and environmental costs associated with plastic pollution, it becomes evident that there are significant structural deficiencies in the plastic market system. It is imperative that we promptly promote large-scale adoption of innovative solutions to address this issue. To achieve this, collaboration and coordination stand out as crucial keys to success.



In her address, Dr. Sara L. Seck, Associate Professor at Dalhousie University, emphasized the necessity of incorporating a Human Rights-Based Approach throughout every phase of the shift towards plastic circularity. She stressed the importance of integrating both circularity and a human rights-based approach into the Business Policy Management System. This integration should inform not only product design but also the management and disposal of waste.

During the panel discussion, the panelists deliberated on

- Advancing comprehension of the human-rights approach to mitigating plastic pollution in Asia.
- Fostering constructive dialogues among businesses, governments, and civil society to explore measures that both governments and the private sector can undertake to strengthen a rights-based approach throughout the entire life cycle of plastics.



Vivekenand Sistla, Head of R&D, Unilever Thailand

Mr. Sistla highlighted the importance of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) principle in driving change. He emphasized the need for companies in the Asia-Pacific region to respond to EPR effectively and discussed Unilever's commitment to this initiative.



Kabir Arora, National Coordinator, Alliance of Indian Waste Pickers

Mr. Arora shed light on the significance of waste pickers in the plastic value chain. He stressed the importance of recognizing their historical role and ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes. He also discussed the adoption of EPR in the region, which should be inclusive of waste pickers.



Madhushree Narayan, Responsible Sourcing Program Manager, The Circulate Initiative

Ms. Narayan discussed the responsibility of businesses in sourcing materials for products. She emphasized the need to ensure that human and environmental rights are respected during the sourcing process. She also touched upon opportunities for innovation in responsible sourcing.



Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director of Law Division, UNEP

Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director of the Law Division at UNEP, outlined strategies to combat plastic pollution and enhance environmental well-being. These strategies encompass the adoption of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, increased transparency, and investments in plastic waste management. She urged businesses to incorporate the informal waste sector into EPR initiatives and endorse a human rights-based approach. The primary recommendation stressed the necessity of transitioning to a sustainable economy by promoting eco-friendly products and designs. She also highlighted the support from the UN Global Compact on Business and Human Rights for businesses committed to environmental rights.

Ms. Kameri-Mbote provided insights into the role of UNEP in setting the environmental agenda. She encouraged businesses to show ambition and leadership in upholding the right to a healthy environment. She also highlighted the support from the UN Global Compact on Business and Human Rights for businesses committed to environmental rights.

Output 2: Strengthening the scientific basis for decision-making

Overview of Strengthening the scientific basis for decision-making

This output centers on building a solid scientific foundation to support evidence-based decision-making in addressing marine plastic litter. SEA circular is committed to creating a harmonized and robust regional approach for monitoring, assessing, and understanding marine pollution, specifically focusing on identifying sources, tracking waste flows, and highlighting critical areas of leakage and accumulation.

1. Regional dialogue on 'Perceptions on plastic waste: A dialogue on the findings of a regional study and the role of businesses in accelerating circularity'



Bangkok, 11 January 2023

Over 150 participants representing government agencies, businesses, start-ups and entrepreneur communities from 20+ countries joined the regional dialogue on 'Perceptions on plastic waste: A dialogue on the findings of a regional study and the role of businesses in accelerating circularity' on November 11, 2022.

The United Nations Environment Programme's SEA circular project in collaboration with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Extension organised this event as part of a Regional Dialogue Series by SEA circular. The dialogue was set out to broadly discuss and share key findings from a regional research study on Perceptions on plastic waste among businesses and consumers in the region, backed by engaging panel dialogue among key industry stakeholders.

The event started with the opening remarks by Dr. Vincent Aloysius. He emphasized the importance of consumer perception and participation when developing strategies for new business models to enhance plastic value chain.



He briefly shared how the current study is a follow-up to the original one that was facilitated in [2020](#); and how the new research incorporated key questions around the impact of the pandemic and emphasized the need to understand change in perception over the 2-year period.



During the keynote speech, Mr. Matt Kovac, CEO of Food Industry Asia (FIA), highlighted key findings on how businesses and customers felt about plastic waste to raise awareness of the problem in the region. He discussed how the production of plastic waste has changed since 2020 when the pandemic affected SMEs' operations and raised concerns about the global supply chain while new technological advancements, regional initiatives, and new regulations have been implemented for the plastic value chain and circularity.

The research recommended priority actions as follows:

- The need for businesses to step up their recycling and R&D efforts as well as join multi-stakeholder coalition groups;
- Consumer education on sustainable packaging and recycling practices;
- Government mandates for consumer waste segregation; and
- The development of sustainable packaging labels by businesses.

Key takeaways from this research

Consumer



- 1 61% and 40% of consumers feel that governments and businesses are actively tackling plastic waste issues, respectively
- 2 While 88% of consumers are concerned about plastic waste issues, only around half of them will switch to purchase products made from recycled materials
- 3 Consumers are focusing their actions on 2 of the "3Rs" (Reduce and Reuse) instead of recycling

Business



- 1 While 85% of businesses are concerned of plastic waste issues, only 53% feel that their current actions are sufficient
- 2 55% of businesses find that the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down their progress in achieving their plastic waste targets
- 3 Businesses feel that their governments should prioritise on **informing and incentivising actions** to reduce plastic waste

Priority actions identified



- Consumers should be **educated on sustainable packaging and recycling habits**
- Businesses should ramp up on **recycling and R&D efforts** as well as **join multi-stakeholder coalitions groups**
- Governments should **enhance waste collection systems, mandate consumer waste segregation, and develop labels for sustainable packaging**

During Part II of the programme, an engaging panel was moderated by Dr. Orathai Pongrakthum, Sustainability Project and Communication Manager, Dow Thailand. The panelists included:

1. Ms. Kirsten van Zandvijk, Director of Sustainability & Partnerships for ASEAN & South Pacific, Coca-Cola Company;
2. Mr. Aaron Lao, President, Philippines Plastic Association;
3. Ms. Ann Claire C. Cabochan, Assistant Secretary for Consumer Protection Group, Philippine Department of Trade and Industry; and
4. Mr. Nattapak Atichartakarn, CEO & Co-Founder, Trash Lucky, took part in this panel discussion.



Through this diverse set of panelists representing private sector, consumer community, a start-up SME with circularity oriented intervention and a plastic industry association, the discussion was driven towards their perspectives on the results of the perception study, gathering insights on initiatives from their organizations and thoughts on the future plans and direction to reduce plastic pollution in the region.

All the panelists acknowledged the key findings from the study – especially the need for strong policies to promote recycling, effective and consistent communication among consumers to better contribute to a circular economy and the role of private sector in supporting sustainable packaging, promoting consumer awareness and leading the way in facilitating policy change.

The discussion among the panelists led to the following key takeaways:

- Large corporations should concentrate on continuing to invest in developing the proper infrastructure and sharing industry-wide lessons with the authorities and other business sectors, to help develop the proper ecosystem for collection and recycling;
- The research findings would be beneficial for future efforts to building a circular economy – in terms of key drivers. Governments should be encouraged to develop waste infrastructure systems that would facilitate adoption of a circular economy and make recycling easier to practice;
- Research study offered helpful information on how to bridge existing gaps of the difficulties associated with the lack of sustainable products that people could afford and the lack of a suitable consumer education system to handle these products;
- Research findings of Perceptions on Plastic are extremely relevant to activities and practices at country level in the region. It has confirmed that the governments have to play a significant role in raising public awareness among consumers on practices

related to responsible consumption and production for better management of plastic waste;

- Likewise, the large corporations use recycled materials in their products can enhance learning and motivate SMEs to begin to follow market trends;
- Encouraging SMEs and scaling up of their solutions can be improved by the support of financial mechanisms and uptake of the solutions through collaboration with big businesses. This can further encourage private sector led efforts. Meanwhile, policy makers can further support appropriate policies and incentives to enable the adoption of extended producer responsibility.

Please keep an eye on our [event page](#) to know more about our upcoming events.

Readers are invited to watch the webinar recording [here](#).

2. Building Foundation for a Robust National Marine Litter Monitoring Programme in the South-East Asia



Bangkok, 14 April 2022

A virtual consultation with SEA circular target countries was held on 4 April, 2022 to strengthen marine litter monitoring efforts in line with Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes adopted by the 25th Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA).

The event was organized by COBSEA Secretariat and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) with funding support from the Government of Sweden through the SEA circular project, implemented jointly with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

26 participants from four COBSEA countries (Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam) joined the webinar to share countries' needs and existing capacities on monitoring and guide next steps to strengthen and develop national monitoring programmes.

Countries discussed about the possible purpose of national monitoring programmes to address national priorities, including tracking the sources, flows and impacts of marine litter and effectiveness of policy responses over time. Countries showed interest in improving and expanding monitoring efforts across habitats and learning new monitoring methods.

Thailand expressed their interest in understanding the effective use of artificial intelligence and technology to assist monitoring efforts.

Representatives also welcomed planned technical assistance and capacity building activities on monitoring under SEA circular, including national training on monitoring and assessment of national marine litter baselines.

“Malaysia recently launched a national action plan on marine litter. We hope COBSEA can assist us in developing and harmonizing our monitoring programme.”, said Mr. Mohd Redzuan Bin Ramli, Assistant Secretary of Environmental Management Division, Ministry of Environment and Water, Malaysia.

“Cambodia faces many marine litter issues and needs technical support and capacity building to develop a national baseline.”, said Mr. Monomoyith Than, Vice Chief office, Department of Marine and Coastal Zone Conservation, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia.

In the coming months, COBSEA will work with CSIRO to conduct follow-up national consultations to guide the following activities:

- Technical assistance for developing harmonized national marine litter monitoring programmes;
- Capacity building on marine litter monitoring;
- Establishing national baselines on marine litter;
- Informing regional assessment of marine litter status and trends.

3. Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes



Bangkok, 21 March 2022

Pollution of the world's oceans by plastic and other anthropogenic solid waste is a transboundary problem. Plastic production, and the consequent loss of plastic solid waste to the environment is growing through time, which is reflected in the growing amount of 'marine litter', predominantly plastic, on the ocean's surface.

The aim of COBSEA Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes is to strengthen national monitoring programmes building on existing capacities and priorities as identified in the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI), while promoting data comparability and aligning efforts at regional and global level. It helps to harmonize marine litter monitoring efforts toward preventing and reducing marine litter and its impacts, in line with the COBSEA RAP MALI.

This document directly responds and addresses regional priorities collectively identified by COBSEA countries, responds to existing monitoring efforts and capacities in participating countries, was developed in a consultative process with contributions from participating countries, and considers the needs and context of individual countries.

Recommendations provided are both regionally appropriate and in line with globally established guidelines, methods, and quality standards. Greater harmonization of monitoring methods corresponds with discussions of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics (AHEG) at its fourth meeting on 9-13 November 2020 (UNEP/AHEG/4/7).

This document was developed as part of the SEA circular project – Reducing marine litter by addressing the management of the plastic value chain in South-East Asia implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), with support from the Government of Sweden.

This document is planned to be launched soon by COBSEA with support from SEA circular project, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

4. COBSEA and National University of Singapore launch database of marine litter research from 13 Asian countries



Bangkok, 5 August 2020 – With plastic pollution a major priority for governments across Asia, scientists have been working diligently to expand our understanding of the problem. But the research has varied widely across countries, including in methodologies, types of data collected, study areas, baselines, and other elements critical to governments who need to make policy decisions based on the research.

Working with the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), the UN Environment Programme has conducted a comprehensive review of nearly 400 scientific publications on marine plastic pollution in 13 countries in South East and East Asia. The review includes a comprehensive report of published plastic pollution research, policies and initiatives in ASEAN+3 as well as a searchable database of research and a series of graphics. It is the first review and database of its kind for the region.

“Research is crucial to support good decision-making,” said Jerker Tamelander, COBSEA Coordinator. “A wealth of research exists in the region, which is critical for governments to make evidence-based decisions. This review gives us a foundation for regional knowledge management and networking on marine plastic pollution.”

Plastic pollution is a national and regional challenge, as plastic waste is generated in substantial amounts and flows across borders across Asia. Ongoing research from the region provides critical information to inform the work of intergovernmental bodies and governments to prevent the waste from entering the marine environment. By consolidating

the research in one place, the hope is that researchers will be able to more easily collaborate and access current scientific knowledge.

“We see a real need and opportunity for establishing regional networks of experts and researchers to catalyse collaborative and interdisciplinary research and bridge existing knowledge gaps,” said Dr. Nilüfer Oral, the Director of the Centre for International Law at NUS.

The review was developed by an interdisciplinary research team with additional support from the UNEP-COBSEA SEA circular project and the Singapore Maritime Institute. With new studies examining the plastic pollution problem being published regularly, the online inventory of marine litter research and frameworks will be continuously expanded and updated.

Visit the [searchable online catalogue of marine litter frameworks](#) and the [marine litter research inventory](#) and read [more about COBSEA's](#) work on marine litter and [NUS' research](#) online.

5. Action plan on marine litter is agreed for South-East Asia



Bali, Indonesia – 28 June 2019: Efforts to combat marine litter given a boost by the adoption of East Asian Seas Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter

The Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter was adopted by nine countries – Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the People’s Republic of China, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – participating in the 24th Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), held in Bali, Indonesia, 19-20 June 2019.

East Asian Seas countries generate large volumes of marine litter because of high coastal population, rapid urbanization, poor waste management and intense shipping and fishing vessel activity. A regional approach to tackling marine litter enables coherent and synergistic, and hence more effective, policy and management responses.

Originally developed in 2008, the revised COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter will guide efforts in the region to tackle marine litter. It also supports and complements work e.g.

through ASEAN, and addresses global priorities identified through the UN Environment Assembly and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14, target 14.1.



Output 3: Outreach

Overview of Outreach

This output focuses on building awareness and driving behavioral change regarding marine litter and plastic pollution among consumers, industry players, and policymakers.

1. Turning the tide on ocean plastic



[Seven Clean Seas](#) was started in 2018 by social entrepreneurs Tom Peacock-Nazil and his wife Pamela Correia, who realized there was a huge opportunity to educate and engage companies to be environmentally and socially minded.

SCS is an Ocean Cleanup Organisation based in Singapore and since its inception has recovered over 127,000kg of plastic pollution from the marine environment alone. It is focused on developing a funding mechanism which can generate capital to facilitate investment into infrastructure and technology solutions to stop plastic reaching the ocean. That funding mechanism is plastic-offsetting and SCS were the first provider globally. SCS helps clients measure and reduce their plastic footprint then offset their necessary plastic by investing in projects which tackle plastic pollution. This helps companies neutralize their impact on the planet and seas whilst redirecting funding to develop the infrastructure and projects needed in areas that are most affected.

SCS have committed to recovering over 10,000,000 kilos of marine debris by 2025 from the top seven worst plastic polluted countries in the world whilst formalising the employment of 200 waste collectors. Since 2018, they've invested in ocean clean-up operations, remote island infrastructure and innovative technology.

2. PLASTIK", a wake up call to end plastic pollution



Bangkok, 6 June 2022

Imagine, a child is drowning in the sea of plastic, people are eating food made of plastic, pets are eating plastic particles – are these not shocking? Yet, these images could become real if we fail to end plastic pollution now. We must not hand over an earth full of single-use plastic to our future generations.

UN Environment Programme through the [SEA circular project](#), introduce a short film, “(PLASTIK)” – commissioned by MeshMinds and produced by Studio Birthplace, that exhibits the significance of both individual and collective action to combat plastic pollution in the South-East Asian region.

The film, featuring a child looking through a telescope made out of a plastic bottle, shows hyperrealist glimpses of a plastic-polluted future. The narrative helps the audience view the plastic pollution crisis through the eyes and imagination of a child. The film warns how human life can be affected if plastic waste becomes unmanageable. It shows that even children can influence their families to say no to single-use plastic and that we must #ActNow to #BeatPollution because we have #OnlyOneEarth.

[Click here to watch the video](#)

Rising global plastic production is estimated to double by 2040 from [400 million tonnes per year](#). Yet it is estimated that only 12% of the plastics produced are incinerated and 9% are recycled. A significant amount of it makes its way into lakes, rivers, and oceans, eventually contaminating our food and water. It not only threatens the livelihoods of those who depend on marine resources for work, but also may lead to a raft of health issues for people who consume seafood infested with toxic micro and nano-plastics.

Launched in conjunction with the World Environment Day 2022, (PLASTIK) visually narrates the social implications of plastic pollution particularly in the South-East Asian context; to raise awareness of the crisis; and to activate emotions and empathy that will drive behavioural change amongst youth in the region to say no to single-use plastic.

“(PLASTIK)” is the first-of-its-kind short film, with a full cast and crew from South-East Asia, that uses creative storytelling and live-action drama that captures the audience and catalyses action to eliminate single-use plastic from lifestyles. It pulls at the heartstrings; and wrenches and warms both equally.

“Only One Earth – is the same theme that was used when the first World Environment Day was held in Stockholm in 1972. Today, 50 years later, this message holds just as true. Planet Earth remains our one and only home, and we must do everything in our power to protect it.

“The film (PLASTIK) has a very strong message connected to this – it’s time we enhance shared responsibility to end plastic pollution. Future generations must be able to enjoy an ocean free from plastic pollution – and food and water free from micro-plastics. This is our responsibility to solve,” shared Mr. Jon Åström Gröndahl, Swedish Ambassador to Thailand, after watching the film.

(PLASTIK) is inspired by the SEA circular project’s [100 Days to #BeatPlasticPollution campaign](#) launched in 2021, which promotes individual actions to beat plastic pollution and continues to catalyze behavioural change, especially in the South-East Asian region.

“Solutions to the systemic challenges of plastic pollution require strong collaboration and accountability across sectors, borders, and value chains. The call to beat plastic pollution is a call for every individual, every business, and every government to act,” said Dechen Tsering, UNEP Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

Due to the rapid growth in plastic production and inadequate management of solid waste – resulting in overflowing landfill sites and plastic leakage, our seas are choked and ecosystems and livelihoods in South-East Asia are threatened. Moreover, a surge in plastic pollution is seen in recent years due to sudden increase in single-use plastics for COVID-19 safety precautions, home delivery, and takeaway food.

“Humankind learns by watching and then doing. Films have the power to effect social change by impactful and compelling storytelling. By illuminating the shared human experience, expands our perspectives beyond our close circle, and inspires us to take action.

“South-East Asia is a hotspot for plastic pollution. We hope that in producing a short film for social media with a fully Asian cast and crew, we can deepen engagement and catalyse long-lasting behaviour change amongst the South-East Asian youth audience to take individual and collective action to end plastic pollution”, says Kay Vasey, Executive Producer of “(PLASTIK)” and the Chief Connecting Officer of MeshMinds.

3. SEA circular supports hotels in Thailand to reduce plastic waste



6 March 2020: SEA circular is launching an initiative to support the hotel industry and the hospitality sector in Thailand to reduce plastic waste.

Tourism, and the related hospitality sector, is a major contributor to plastic waste in Thailand. The country welcomed 38.1 million tourists in 2018, according to Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Tourism Intelligence Centre, impacting the environment and producing a colossal volume of waste.

With a tourism industry worth upwards of 12 trillion Thai baht, and more than 10,000 hotels in the country, this sector is arguably one of the most damaging in terms of plastic waste generation in Thailand.

Plastics are widely used in hotels to support travellers' requirements for convenience, sanitary concerns and aesthetic appeal. From the cups, straws, coffee lids, shampoo bottles, amenity kits, water bottles, and room minibars, to the hotel breakfast buffets, event spaces, and back of house activities, plastics are everywhere in the industry.

Many hotels are aware of the environmental and economic challenges created by their plastic waste. Several hotel chains are developing initiatives to strengthen their sustainability policies and corporate social responsibility (CSR) schemes. Some hotel chains have already developed ambitious goals and sustainability objectives on the use of plastics.

SEA circular is working to support hotels in Thailand as they transform towards less plastic wasted, throughout their operations.

The project is holding a series of 'roundtable events' for various sectors to support plastic pollution prevention. For the hotel industry in Thailand, roundtable events are being held for hoteliers and tourism accommodation owners. Hoteliers will discuss best practices, lessons learned and incentives for aggregate industry action. The aim is to support and urgently scale-up plastic waste reduction initiatives and commitments.

Concrete solutions may include; reducing plastic packaging used for bathroom amenities, reducing the use of plastic bags in hotel rooms, reduction of plastic water bottles, and the elimination of plastic straws and single use plastic food or drink containers. Other initiatives to support a more circular approach to waste management include the installation of separate trash bins and waste segregation, as well as incentives and awareness-raising for guests to commit to use less plastic.

The roundtable events will also explore solutions for more challenging issues, including the plastic items coming in from suppliers and from back-of-house activities. These involve areas which are not customer-facing – but are no less damaging.

SEA circular's engagement with key players in the hotel industry will also provide vital opportunities for industry information-sharing amongst common initiatives. The ultimate goal is that collective monitoring and promotion of best practices can drive industry standards towards less plastic wasted.

4. #CleanSeas #StayHome challenge



4 May 2020: Children worldwide are out of school and learning from home, as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

It can be difficult to occupy your children with exciting activities for hours on end, especially when you may also be working from home.

UNEP are inviting you to take part in a creative new social media challenge, focusing on plastic pollution and recycling.

Get involved without even leaving the house, by getting creative with the everyday plastic waste in your household, and learning more about plastic waste at the same time.

Your child can choose from a range of activity suggestions and post their plastic waste activity on social media using the **#CleanSeas** and **#StayHome** hashtags for a chance to be featured on UNEP social media channels.

Ideas:

1. Make a musical instrument out of plastic rubbish
2. Sorting your plastic items
3. Have a plastic-free spa day
4. Make a boat from plastic waste- see if it floats!
5. Put on a fashion show of clothes made from plastic waste

Idea 1: make a musical instrument out of plastic rubbish

Encourage your children to use (clean) plastic rubbish to make their own instruments. They can even put on a concert for you or for social media. [Click here to get some inspiration for the instruments you could make.](#)

Idea 2: go through your cupboards and sort its content, like utensils, etc. into the type of material they are made of

Every day we use lots of plastic products without thinking about their impact on the planet. Go into your kitchen cupboards with your child and ask them to sort everything into the type of material (plastics, cardboard, aluminum, etc.) Ask your children to pick out the items that can be recycled and show them where on the packaging they can see if its recyclable or not. The [United Nations Environment Programme Clean Seas educational pack](#) can help to show children in greater detail what different types of plastic are out there, and ways that they can reduce their use of them.

Idea 3: have a plastic-free spa day

You might not be able to go out to a spa, but that doesn't mean you can't bring the spa to you! From baby wipes to scrubs with microplastics in (plastic pieces smaller than 5 mm), plastic is hidden in plain sight in many personal care products. [Here you can see some of the sources of plastic pollution in your bathroom.](#) A great way to combat hidden plastics is to have a do-it-yourself family home spa day. You can show your children how to make great natural scrubs from coconut oil, sugar and salt, and you can also make face masks from honey and bananas. Make some home treatments, put on some calming music, and relax.

Idea 4: make a boat out of plastic waste

Many things that seem like soon-to-be trash can be given a fun new lease of life. Using plastic that you might otherwise throw away, help your child to make a small plastic raft or boat. They can put them in the bath or sink to see if they float and even take their toys on a boat ride! If possible, you could even take them to your local pond or stream and have raft races.

A recent Clean Seas campaign took part in this activity on a larger scale. [A nine-metre long dhow made from 10 tonnes of recycled trash found on Kenya's shorelines called "Flipflopi"](#) sailed from Lamu, Kenya to Zanzibar raising awareness about plastic pollution.

Idea 5: put on a fashion show of clothes made out of rubbish

Upcycling—or “making new furniture, objects, etc. out of old or used things or waste material”—is one of the best fashion trends for the environment. In 2016, [American Rob Greenfield wore every piece of trash he created in a month](#), turning it into a bulky trash-suit. Why not get your child to make some stylish fashion accessories out of plastic waste? They can put on a fashion show for you with their new creations!

There are many more ways that you can teach your children about plastic pollution and its impacts. UNEP's [Clean Seas website](#) has advice for how to reduce your plastic footprint, and the impact that plastic pollution is having.

5. Plastic Waste Photo Contest



Plastic waste – A Global Problem

The pollution of our marine and terrestrial environment by plastic waste is one of the most pressing global environmental challenges faced today. Over the last ten years, we have produced more plastic than during the whole of the last century: global plastic production

has increased steadily and reached 320 million tonnes a year. Of the estimated 6.3 billion tonnes of plastic waste produced since the 1950s, only 9% has been recycled and another 12% incinerated. An estimated 100 million tonnes of plastic is in our seas, 80-90% of which has come from land-based sources. The good news is, since an estimated 80% of that land-based waste is due to a lack of efficient collection and management schemes, the problem is solvable.

Plastic Waste Partnership

The Basel Convention, the UN's multilateral environmental treaty on the prevention, minimisation and sound management of waste, is providing a platform that unites stakeholders from governments, international organisations, NGOs, academia, and industry towards the common objective of eliminating the leakage of plastic waste into our environment. The Plastic Waste Partnership (PWP), initiated in May 2019, is mobilising its broad stakeholder base to tackle the issue of plastic pollution on multiple fronts: from stimulating the development of strategies to strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks within countries; to developing solutions to improve the collection, separation and sound management of plastic waste; and stimulating innovations for increasing the durability, reusability, reparability and recyclability of plastics. The Partnership creates a collaborative environment promoting the sharing of experiences, best practices and technologies towards this common objective.

Contest

On the inaugural day of its first meeting on 2 March 2020, the Plastic Waste Partnership will launch a photography contest to promote outreach, education and awareness-raising on the global plastic waste crisis. The contest welcomes entries from all walks of life: from amateur to professional photographers, of all ages. Through the contest, the Partnership wants to shine a light not only on the plastic waste problem, but also the solutions out there, our collective progress to date and the challenges and opportunities moving forward. As the recent COVID-19 pandemic has seen a soar in the amount of single-use plastic waste generated, giving visibility to the problem and the solutions has become more pressing than ever before.

Entered photos will be judged by a panel including the [National Geographic](#) Photographer Sara Hylton, and winning images will be used for a Basel Convention plastic waste calendar and displayed at the 2021 meetings of the Conference of Parties, or Triple COPs, in Geneva Switzerland!

Categories

Contest participants are invited to submit their entries in the following six categories which relate to the impacts of the plastic waste problem, the progress we've made and where we need to focus our attention:

1. Let's go outside! – Plastic waste and nature
2. Plastic waste and our health and livelihoods
3. Tiny but everywhere: Microplastics
4. Let's use it! – Plastic waste as a resource
5. Let's do it! – Solutions for avoiding single-use plastic products
6. Let's fix it! – Alternatives, new technologies and innovation

Three (3) winners will be announced in each category: 1 amateur, 1 professional adult and 1 child. Exciting prizes and visibility will be offered to each winner

Output 4: Regional networking

Overview of Regional Collaboration and Networking Initiatives

This output centers on building a cohesive, regional approach to tackling marine litter through facilitated networking, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among stakeholders. By leveraging partnerships, including with the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter and ASEAN, this initiative aims to align national and regional efforts with global objectives, promoting synergy and efficiency across Southeast Asia.

1. Empowering Regional Collaboration: Addressing Marine Litter in East Asian Seas



Bangkok, 10 October 2023

Marine litter has become an escalating global concern, posing a significant threat to our environment and ecosystems. In East Asian Seas, where the marine environment is a crucial part of the region's identity and economy, addressing this issue has become a top priority. A recent regional workshop in Bangkok, Thailand, shed light on the importance of advancing data analysis and data comparability in the East Asian Seas to tackle marine litter effectively.

Background

The Regional Workshop on Marine Litter Monitoring was organized by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), in partnership with Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), with support from the [SEA circular](#) and MA-RE – DESIGN projects brought together experts, stakeholders, and representatives from nine COBSEA participating

countries. The goal was to discuss ways to harmonize marine litter monitoring efforts and empower the region to take collective action against plastic pollution and marine litter. The workshop saw the active participation of approximately 60 attendees from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam were represented in person, while China and the Republic of Korea joined virtually.

National Baseline Surveys and Capacity Building

In 2022, the SEA circular Project, in partnership with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), played a pivotal role in facilitating the national baseline surveys conducted in Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. These surveys served as the cornerstone for establishing robust monitoring practices within the COBSEA countries. Moreover, the initiative also included training programs on marine litter monitoring methods, which were delivered both at regional and national levels. It becomes increasingly apparent that there is a rising demand for capacity building, with a specific emphasis on enhancing skills in data analysis and ensuring data comparability.

Key Highlights from the Workshop

The workshop provided a platform for experts to share insights and experiences. Notably, the importance of robust survey design and harmonized methods for effective plastic pollution and marine litter management was emphasized. It was revealed that structured surveys and metadata collection can enhance data collection from cleanup activities, including citizen science efforts.

Data Analysis: The Crucial Next Step

The importance of data analysis in the decision-making process was underscored. The workshop highlighted key steps for data analysis and measures to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and interventions. An approach known as the Before – After – Control – Impact (BACI) design was recommended. This design is particularly useful for examining changes in litter patterns before and after policy implementation, or in response to local changes.

Conclusions and Next Steps

To address marine litter effectively, harmonization, transparency, and data management are paramount. Countries are encouraged to collaborate, share resources, and promote transparency. The establishment of a secure regional monitoring data platform is on the horizon. COBSEA's commitment to capacity building and regional cooperation is vital to address transboundary marine plastic pollution.



2. Empowering UN Resident Coordinators: Strategies to Combat Plastic Pollution in the Asia Pacific Region



Bangkok, 28 February 2024

Plastic pollution is a global crisis demanding urgent action by all. The recent briefing session organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in collaboration with the Development Coordination Office (DCO) shed light on the concerted efforts underway to address this pressing issue. Held as part of the Asia-Pacific Region Resident Coordinators' Annual Retreat, the session aimed to equip Resident Coordinators (RCs) from Asia Pacific with insights and tools to spearhead effective UN actions against plastic pollution in the region.



From Left to Right-Mr. Dirk Wagener, UN Resident Coordinator to Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, Ms. AnnaMaria Oltorp, Head of Development Cooperation Section–Regional Asia and the Pacific, Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, Mr. Anouj Mehta, Country Director, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Thailand , Ms. Gita Sabharwal, UN Resident Coordinator to Thailand and Mr. Umesh Madhavan, Research Director, the Circulate Initiative.

Understanding the Context

The backdrop of the briefing underscored the escalating urgency to combat plastic pollution, with the ongoing global efforts through the [Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee \(INC\)](#) striving to establish an international legally binding instrument by 2024. UNEP's [One Plastics Initiative \(OPI\)](#) is at the forefront of this battle, consolidating efforts across industry, policy, finance, and capacity building. At the country level, RCs play a pivotal role in guiding UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in formulating policies, developing projects, fostering collaborations, and mobilizing finances to combat plastic pollution effectively.

To build upon the ever-strong momentum to address plastic pollution, UNEP and DCO convened a specialized session involving 24 Resident Coordinators from the Asia Pacific regions. The session aimed to tackle the escalating challenge of plastic pollution, raising awareness of RCs of the current landscape and actionable solutions, while encouraging more impactful UN initiatives in the area.



Active participation in the Q&A session by RC's

Key Highlights from the Session



Marlene Nilsson, the Acting Regional Director for the UNEP Asia Pacific Office, assumed the role of moderator for the initial session. Subsequently, Dirk Wagener, the Resident Coordinator for Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, moderated the panel discussion that ensued.



The session was divided into two segments, focusing on the concept of [bankable projects and the dynamics of resource mobilization](#). Dr. Mushtaq Memon from UNEP provided an overview, emphasizing the need to leverage global financial assets to bridge the substantial funding gap for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite significant investments in downstream solutions, it was highlighted that there is a critical need to shift focus towards upstream interventions.



Brenda Koekkoek from the INC Secretariat delved into the evolving considerations around [financial mechanisms and national plans](#) within the INC process, highlighting ongoing discussions and proposed options.

Speakers and panelists included ([read bios](#)):

- **Gita Sabharwal**, UN Resident Coordinator to Thailand
- **Anna Maria Oltorp**, Head of Development Cooperation Section–Regional Asia and the Pacific, Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok
- **Anouj Mehta**, Country Director, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Thailand
- **Umesh Madhavan**, Research Director, the Circulate Initiative

The panel discussion brought together perspectives from RCs, development partners, and private sector analysts. Insights ranged from the UN's role in country-level programming to the challenges and opportunities in developing bankable projects. It was echoed by panelists that efforts should be made in the following areas to address some of the challenges:

- Capacity building among producers and users of plastic products.
- Raising awareness about the importance of sustainable practices.
- Developing project concepts to attract innovative financing.
- Scaling up funds through public financing mechanisms.



Panelists discussed on bankable plastic projects, co-creation and where this is applied?

The Role of RCs and UNCTs

RCs and UNCTs were identified as crucial facilitators in promoting cross-agency collaboration and leveraging partnerships. Their role in convening relevant stakeholders and fostering deep relationships within UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UNRCOs) was underscored. Additionally, there was a call for proactive engagement in developing the international legally binding instrument on plastics.

UNEP's Ongoing Support

UNEP's continuous support towards UNCTs in addressing plastic pollution was acknowledged, particularly its technical assistance and utilization of technology for mapping pollution hotspots. Participants expressed interest in receiving support from the UNEP's Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) to develop viable project pipelines, highlighting the importance of financial support in tackling environmental challenges effectively.

Asia-Pacific Regional Resident Coordinators' Annual retreat 2024

Conclusion

The session served as a crucial platform for exchanging experiences, understanding investment requirements, and identifying strategic interventions to combat plastic pollution in the Asia Pacific region. With collaborative efforts and innovative financing mechanisms, RCs and UNCTs are poised to drive meaningful change and contribute to a cleaner, healthier future for all.

3. SEA circular report warns plastic policies lagging behind in South-East Asia



Bangkok, 13 November 2019 – A new UN Environment Programme (UNEP) assessment of plastic waste policies, developed by the SEA circular project, has determined that limited packaging-related policies and weak enforcement are aggravating the problem of plastic pollution in South-East Asian countries.

The report goes on to recommend that harmonized, pan-ASEAN policies would be a boon to countries in tackling the plastic pollution problem. It also suggests that countries would benefit from shared technology hubs in the ASEAN region for recycling and monitoring of the trade in plastic waste.

“South-East Asia is a primary source and victim of plastic, where it is choking seas and threatening ecosystems and livelihoods,” said Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida, UNEP’s Regional Coordinator for Chemicals and Waste. “If we want to solve the marine litter problem globally, we have to solve it in this region.”

Over half of the land-based plastic pollution in our oceans originates from just five countries, four of which are in South-East Asia. This pollution has more than an environmental impact – plastic litter in the Asia-Pacific region alone costs its tourism, fishing and shipping industries \$1.3 billion per year.

The report, [The Role of Packaging Regulations and Standards in Driving the Circular Economy](#), is the first comprehensive look at policies on packaging waste and standards in 10 countries in South-East Asia. It also compares South-East Asian policies to those elsewhere, such as the EU and Japan. The review shows that in the latter jurisdictions, the packaging of waste is managed more sustainably due to a presence of national targets, an overarching life cycle approach to packaging, and adopting policy that emphasizes solutions that address the root cause of the problem.

UNEP launched the report at [SEA of Solutions 2019](#), the first annual partnership week convened by SEA circular – an initiative from UNEP and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), with support from the Swedish Government.

4. ASEAN Declaration on Combatting Marine Debris



22 June 2019, Bangkok – The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has promised in a joint declaration that its members will take concrete actions to “prevent and significantly reduce marine debris”, through the possible development of an East Asia regional plan of action and guidelines.

South East Asia is a major contributor to the plastic that is choking the world’s oceans, partly due to poor municipal waste management systems. In a 2015 report, the non-profit Ocean Conservancy noted that 55 to 60 percent of plastic waste entering the oceans comes from just five countries, including four in the region: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The debris kills marine life and breaks down into microparticles that make their way into seafood eaten by humans.

South East Asian nations have acknowledged their role in the pollution and pledged to curtail it. The Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region was adopted by leaders of the 10-member ASEAN, which includes four of the world’s top polluters.

In 2018, Malaysia announced that it will eliminate single-use plastic by 2030 and published a roadmap towards achieving the goal. Indonesia, the world’s second largest marine plastic polluter after China, has said that it will spend up to US\$1 billion per year to reduce its marine waste by 70 per cent between 2017 and 2025.

The declaration was commended by environmentalists as a good first step for the region, though doubts remained that implementation will be a challenge because the group has a code of non-interference that would leave necessary policymaking in the hands of individual member countries.

SEA circular is working with nine ASEAN countries to support enabling policies and promote the vision and ambition of the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN region.

5. Collaborative action to end plastic pollution in South-East Asia



Bangkok, 2 July 2022

Read the event report [here](#).

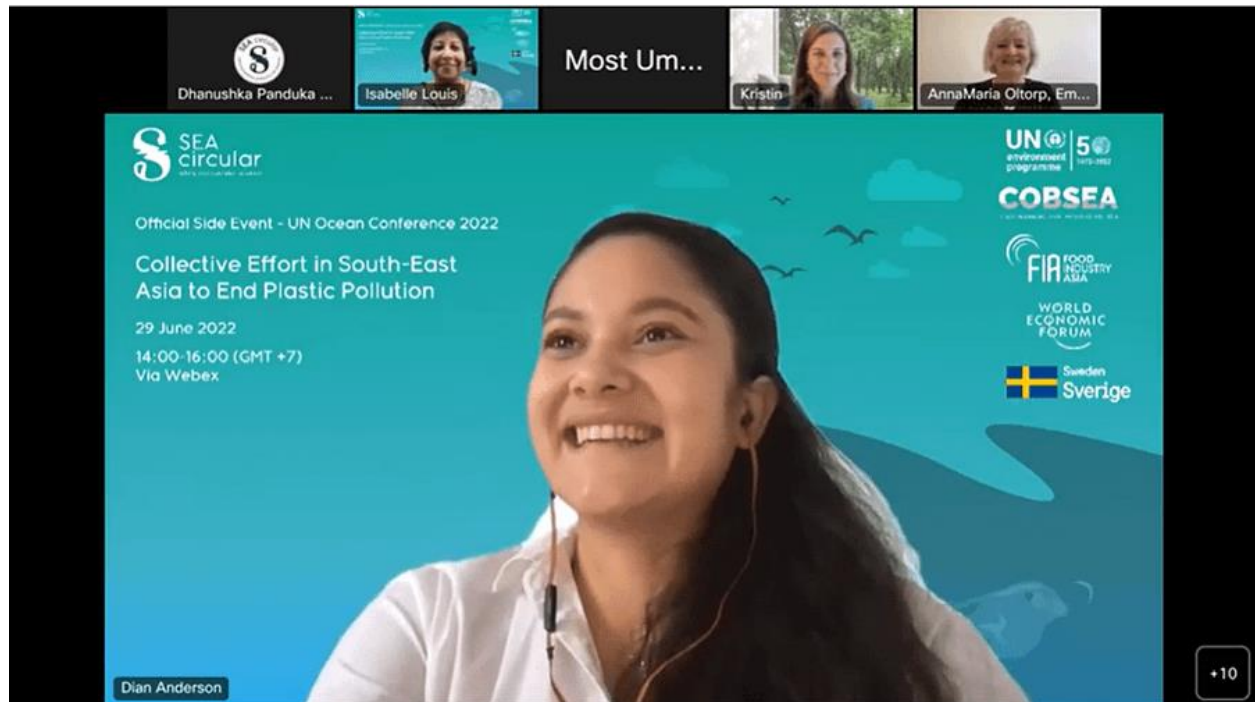
An ambitious [global agreement to end plastic pollution](#) will not be possible without the commitment and collective actions among the governments, private sectors, civil society organizations, and consumers. In South-East Asian region, the [momentum to end plastic](#) pollution has picked up despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United Nations Environment Programme's SEA circular project organized a virtual side event at the [UN Ocean Conference 2022 on 29 June 2022](#) to discuss the way forward towards the Global Plastic Agreement and the preparation for the intergovernmental negotiations to tackle plastic pollution in the South-East Asian Region through collaborative actions among the governments, businesses and private sectors, consumers, and development partners.

The event was organized in collaboration with [the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia \(COBSEA\)](#), World Economic Forum's [Global Plastics Action Partnership \(GPAP\)](#), and [Food Industry Asia \(FIA\)](#).

In the welcoming speech, Ms. Isabelle Louis, Deputy Regional Director, UN Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific highlighted, "Countries in South-East Asia are increasingly visible in their advocacy and demonstration of solutions in national, regional

and Global platforms in sharing experiences, accelerating efforts, and engaging in regional and global processes for change”.

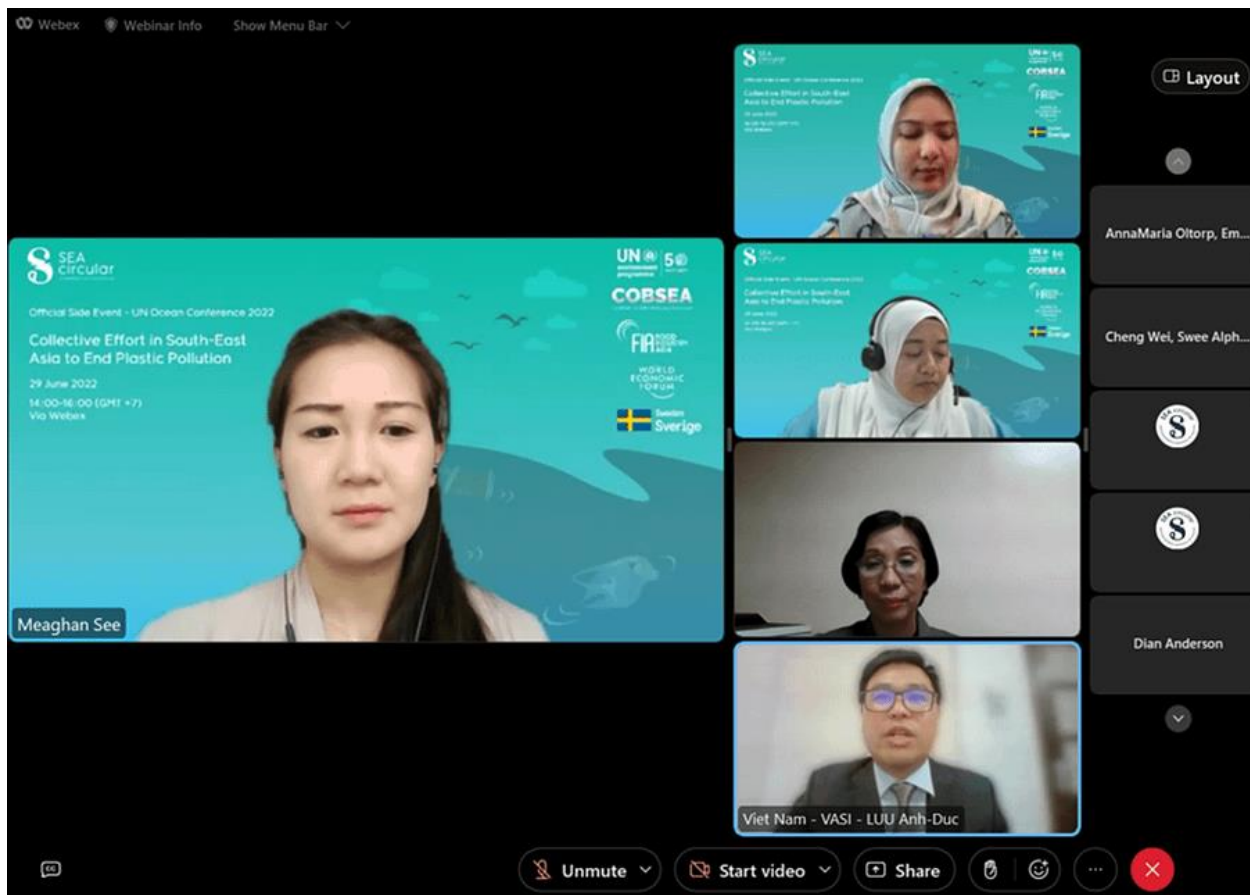


310 participants from different countries across the world, especially from South-East Asia, joined this discussion and exchanged thoughts, queries, and ideas through question-answers and live poll participation.

Ms. AnnaMaria Oltorp, Head of Development Cooperation Section – Regional Asia and the Pacific, Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, said in her opening speech, *“Our future generations should be able to enjoy an ocean free from plastic pollution and food and water free from microplastics. This is our responsibility to solve”*.

The Director of Global Plastic Action Partnership at World Economic Forum, Ms. Kristin Hughes, set the scene, *“Like the rest of the world, South-East Asia has experienced rapid growth in plastic production and use over the past few decades. Though the per capita single-use plastic consumption is lower than in other regions, in many South-East Asian countries there is a severe lack of adequate waste management that amplifies its negative impact”*.

Representatives from four ASEAN member countries joined a dynamic panel discussion titled *“Transforming Commitment into Action to End Plastic Pollution”* to share national-level plans and efforts in this area.



Amongst several interesting topics, the panel acknowledged the importance of and commitment to innovative mechanisms for financing and monitoring of investments in the area of plastic waste management to drive results. In addition, they emphasized plans and actions towards actively engaging the informal sector in their journey to achieve their national plans of action on marine litter.

Ms. Nor Haswani Kamis from the Ministry of Environment and Water in Malaysia said that her government is looking forward to actively participating in the International Negotiating Committee (INC) process, and already started discussions with national stakeholders, which include different ministries, business associations, Petro-Chemical producers, plastic manufacturers, retailers, resellers, and NGOs.

She further stressed that consumer behaviour is what determines the direction, action, and effectiveness. We expect consumers to change, there must be enough alternative options for them to use instead of plastics.

Mr. Anh-Duc LUU from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Viet Nam shared that Viet Nam has issued a strategy for sustainable development of the marine economy in parallel with the protection of the marine environment and eco-system.

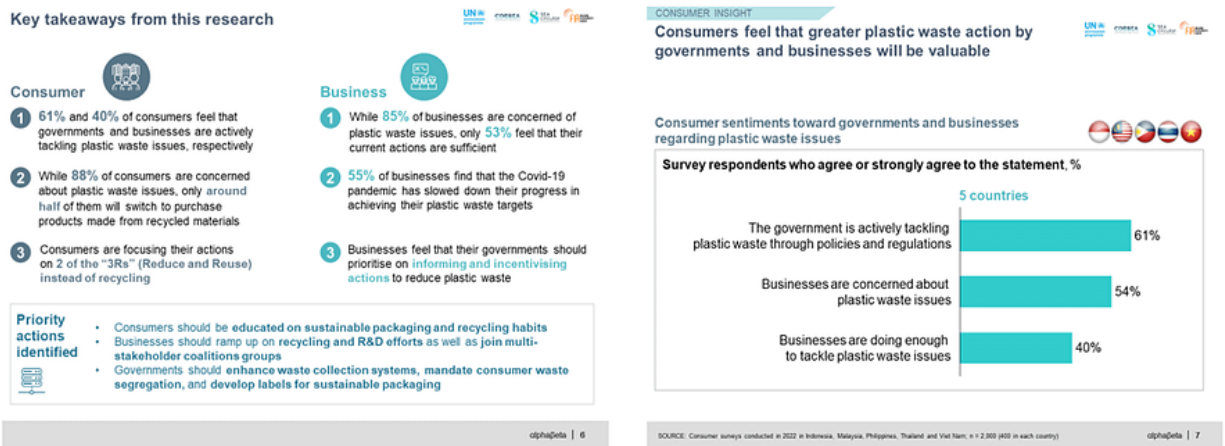
On the other hand, the Philippines has adopted 10 strategies to reduce and manage marine litter pollution, as mentioned by Ms. Consolacion P. Crisostomo from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines. The country is working on a law for taking back the packaging (plastics) to the producers, that will effectively address the plastic pollution crisis”.

At the same time, Indonesia has regulation and call for reduction of waste by 30 percent and handling of waste by 70 percent by 2025, as stated by Ms. Zenitha Astra Paramita from the Ministry of Finance in Indonesia.

She further added, “We have national and regional government, private sector and communities tackling plastic waste management. Additionally, we need to change the consumers’ behaviour. We encourage the informal sector and waste collector to come up with ways on how we can work hand-in-hand to make this happen”.

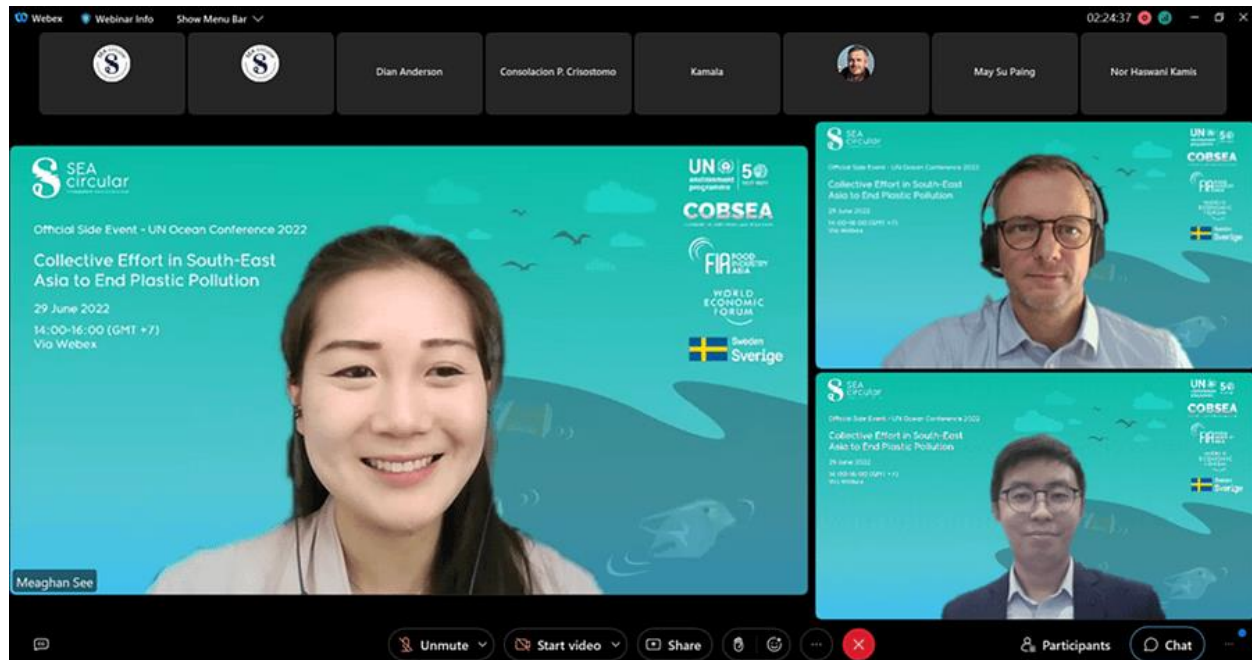
In the second half of the event, some interesting findings from a recent survey to understand the perception of businesses and consumers on plastics and policies for circularity in South-East Asia, which was commissioned by [SEA circular project](#) with Food Industry Asia, was shared by Mr. Cheng Wei Swee from AlphaBeta.

The study was conducted among 400 consumers and 300 businesses in five countries of South-East Asia including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.



The sneak peeks into the survey results revealed that **61% and 40% of consumers** feel that governments and businesses are actively tackling plastic waste issues, respectively. While **85% of businesses** are concerned about plastic waste issues, only 53% feel that their current actions are sufficient. On the other hand, **88% of consumers** are concerned about plastic waste issues, while only around half of them will switch to purchase products made from recycled materials.

Nevertheless, businesses and consumers demand action to address plastic pollution, acknowledge that they need to do more, and commit to increasing their contributions with better awareness and guidance. While businesses commented that their works towards plastic waste management were significantly derailed by the pandemic, they agreed that their efforts have increased now and confirmed commitment to collective action with other stakeholders.



Later, some good practice examples from the Food and Beverage sector by the leading companies were shared by the CEO of Food Industry Asia, Mr. Matt Kovac. This short talk revealed palpable demonstration of real commitment, resource allocation, progress, and responsibility amongst the leading organizations in the industry when it comes to addressing plastic waste.

The event was hosted by **Ms. Dian Anderson, Associate Director of EB Impact**, and the panel discussions were moderated by **Ms. Meaghan See, Director of Partnerships, Eco Business**.

Audiences are invited to watch the webinar recording, [here](#).

6. Collaboration to combat marine litter in Thailand



Bangkok, 7 June 2019 – UN Environment, supported by the Government of Sweden, is forging partnerships between Government agencies, the private sector, civil society and academia in Thailand, to tackle the transboundary challenge of marine litter.

A new initiative ‘SEA circular – solving plastic pollution at source’ is focussing on identifying market-based solutions and enabling policies to prevent marine plastic pollution. Striving for less plastic wasted and a more circular economy requires commitment from stakeholders throughout the plastic value chain.

Plastic debris is a major threat to marine ecosystems. Globally, more than 80 per cent of marine plastic litter comes from land-based sources. Rapid growth, combined with inadequate waste management capacity, means that five Asian countries alone – Thailand is one of them – may be responsible for as much as 60 per cent of plastic waste leakage into the oceans.

SEA circular held a Thailand Stakeholder Consultation on Reducing marine litter by addressing the management of the plastic value chain in South East Asia on 7 June 2019. The event was convened by UN Environment, the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East of Asia (COBSEA), and the Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE), supported by the Government of Sweden. A wide range of delegates attended, from local government, private sector, academia, civil society organizations, UN agencies and other inter-governmental agencies.

“A healthy environment relies on us seeking solutions to marine plastic pollution by working in partnership with regulators, investors and policymakers, throughout the plastic value chain,” said Isabelle Louis, Deputy Regional Director, UN Environment.

UN Environment encourages a ‘people-centred approach’ to marine waste management, to support the most vulnerable groups impacted by marine litter and to improve the living standards of the informal waste management sector.

The Government of Thailand affirmed their commitment to strengthening partnerships to tackle marine plastic pollution – to meet their objectives in the Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management 2018-2030, and under the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris. The Government recently announced that they will phase out seven types of plastic items starting in 2019 and completing in 2022 – including plastic bottle cap seals, oxo-type plastics, microbeads, plastic bags of less than 36 microns, foam food containers, single-use plastic cups, and plastic straws. The country also aims to recycle 100% of plastic waste by 2027.

The Food and Drug Administration of Thailand (FDA) outlined plans to revise restrictions on the use of recycled plastic for food packaging, through collaboration between government agencies and the private sector.

Innovative solutions to plastic pollution were presented by influential corporations, including the Siam Cement PLC / SCG, Coca-Cola Thailand Ltd. and IKEA Southeast Asia – who are spearheading new ways to do business, whilst reducing their plastic footprint and minimizing waste to landfill. Local government officials from Rayong and Chiang Mai presented their actions to promote circular economy principles. Grassroots movements such as Trash Hero showcased how they are galvanizing action and raising awareness. Also in attendance were biodegradable packaging company Gracz, Food Industry Association (FIA), Phuket Hotel Association, Swedish Thai Chamber of Commerce and a range of corporations and private sector organisations.

“It is inspiring to hear about the ambitious commitments against plastic pollution here in Thailand. Together, we can work for a more circular economy and cleaner seas,” said Staffan Herrström, Swedish Ambassador to Thailand.

A new logo and branding for SEA circular were launched during the Thailand Stakeholder Consultation.

Next steps for SEA circular include the first annual ‘SEA of Solutions’ partnership week, at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, 11-15 November 2019. ‘SEA of Solutions’ will build multi-stakeholder partnerships between governments, the private sector, international investors and innovators, local communities and grassroots organisations, to solve plastic pollution at source.

7. SEA circular advances coordination on marine litter and plastic circular economy initiatives in South-East Asia



9 March 2020, Bangkok, Thailand: SEA circular is working to advance coordination on regional marine litter and plastic circular economy initiatives.

The need for ambitious actions to combat marine litter in the South-East Asia and East Asian Seas region is growing, alongside the number of initiatives to tackle this immense challenge. This has led to a proliferation of activities, including various regional or multinational projects.

SEA circular convened the [‘Marine litter and plastic circular economy initiatives coordination workshop’](#) with the goal to identify synergies between initiatives, strengthen cooperation and avoid redundancy, as well as promote alignment of activities,

The meeting was conducted via teleconferencing, allowing for other project leads based in Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nepal to join participants in Thailand. This was also a practical measure in response to COVID-19 meeting protocols.

The meeting was organised by SEA circular, with co-hosts IUCN MARPLASTICs and WWF EPR. A total of 15 projects were represented, from multilateral organizations, bilaterals, NGOs, and CSOs, covering plans and activities along the entire plastic value chain.

A roll call of projects and objectives was provided by participating organizations, identifying the range of activities and interventions underway across the plastics value chain. This is a first step towards mapping out and establishing where there are overlaps and gaps across all the various projects and programmes.

Moving forward

SEA circular is leading the formation of a set of 'working groups' which will facilitate project leads to maintain open dialogue with colleagues across the spectrum of organizations. This will support the consideration of synergies and ongoing opportunities, and advance lessons learned across projects and programmes towards less plastics wasted.

SEA circular is also pushing for a common understanding, common baselines and definition of terms, in order for a shared understanding, as well as clear messaging and communications, as each organization interfaces with governments, businesses and the public.

Next steps for the initiative will see SEA circular convening periodic follow-up meetings of the project leads, to discuss opportunities for working together. A project database of 'marine litter and plastic circular economy projects' is planned for the SEA circular platform, which will be searchable in terms of countries of implementation, specific scope and main areas of intervention.