



**United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme**

**Ad hoc open-ended expert group
on marine litter and microplastics**

Fourth meeting

Online, 9–13 November 2020

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Progress in relevant work pursuant to United Nations
Environment Assembly resolution 4/6 on marine plastic
litter and microplastics**

**Progress on the establishment of a digital multi-stakeholder
platform for marine litter and microplastics**

Note by the Secretariat

1. The United Nations Environment Assembly decided, in resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 operative paragraph 3:

“... to strengthen coordination and cooperation by establishing, subject to the availability of resources and building on existing initiatives, a multi-stakeholder platform within the United Nations Environment Programme to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination, through a life-cycle approach, of discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans. This may include the following functions:

 - (a) Serving as a forum for enabling governments, industry, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to share experiences and coordinate action on a regular or ad hoc basis;*
 - (b) Serving as a repository for assessments of the ways in which land- and sea-based sources of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, are addressed at the national, regional and international levels; conceptual and practical guidance materials to help governments, organizations and private entities address aspects of marine litter; and current action plans, management practices and guidelines for enabling, enhancing and supporting action to prevent the discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment;*
 - (c) Raising global awareness of the issue with a wide variety of audiences, including governments, policymakers, resource managers, educators, private-sector entities and the public;*
 - (d) Establishing and maintaining a database of technical and scientific information related to marine litter, such as inventories of discharges into the marine environment, scientific studies and innovations to address marine litter;*
 - (e) Promoting collaboration among relevant scientific mechanisms to facilitate access to scientific data and information in order to disseminate sound scientific practices, such as guidelines for the sampling and analysis of marine macroplastics and microplastics, and to improve the policy relevance of research;*

* UNEP/AHEG/4/1.

(f) Promoting action in the framework of regional seas conventions and programmes, subject to the availability of resources, to address marine litter through action plans, protocols, partnerships and other activities;”

2. Recognizing the language included in UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 operative paragraph 3, including use of the words “forum,” “repository,” and “databases,” the numerous stakeholders involved in the coordination of action on a regular or ad hoc basis, as well as the need to build on existing initiatives, a digital platform is required which will provide the digital arm of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML)¹, thereby also supporting the request in UNEP/EA.3/Res.7 subparagraph 7 (a) to strengthen the contribution of the UN Environment Programme to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). The GPML digital platform (herein referred to as the digital platform) will provide curated, on-demand resources and data customized to various stakeholder communities to elevate the impact of this initiative and make it accessible to diverse audiences. Matchmaking functionalities will facilitate ad hoc coordination and the GPML will further launch the GPML Action Track, to facilitate coordination on a regular basis.
3. After establishing the primary scope and rationale for a digital platform, this document aims to provide a progress update of the establishment of the digital platform which will further curate and feed information to the World Environment Situation Room (WESR), engaging multiple partners in the process.

1. Introduction

4. The digital platform will enable strong coordination and cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders (including government, private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia, and more) to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination, through a life-cycle approach, of discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans.
5. Further to the details provided by resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 paragraph 3 on Marine plastic litter and microplastics, previous resolutions on the topic i.e. those listed below have also highlighted the need of enabling creation, collection, sharing and consolidation of information, data and resources as well as the request to facilitate coordination, collaboration with other relevant stakeholders and to strengthen UNEPs contribution to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). Listed below are examples of other resolution paragraphs that are kept in mind when considered when the development of various functionalities planning.
 - a) UNEP/EA.1/Res.6: Marine plastic debris and microplastics (2014), paragraphs 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18;
 - b) UNEP/EA.2/Res.11: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2016), paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23;
 - c) UNEP/EA.3/Res.7: Marine litter and microplastics (2017), paragraphs 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10(b)(c);
 - d) UNEP/EA.4/Res.6: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2019), paragraphs 1, 4, 7, 8.
6. The Secretariat has undertaken and coordinated the creation of tools to make resources and data available (as further elaborated in point 12), which will become part of the digital platform. Additionally, the Secretariat has explored which features are needed to enable the digital experience and will be further refine those during the consultations with platform stakeholders according to their needs.

¹ Further information on the Global Partnership on Marine Litter can be found in the Framework Document available via this link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OeUfPuydsSB6m7-gkzyYa0YImNC1UrWP/view>

2. Goals and definitions of the digital platform

7. The digital platform aims to integrate data and information from multiple sources; connect stakeholders; identify gaps and help prioritize actions; coordinate and guide action based on the best available information; and, facilitate target setting and measuring progress, including towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other environmental indicators.
 - a) Integrate data and information from multiple sources to:
 - i. Provide data from diverse sources to improve availability of information and maximizing the utility of existing data.
 - ii. Support the creation of country and global dashboards with high-level metrics on marine litter pollution and waste management.
 - iii. Enable users to detect leakage hotspots (lifecycle, value-chain, source-to-sea) to effectively craft interventions.
 - iv. Create application program interfaces (APIs) to leverage the functionality of external platforms; to access and use local-to-global open data.
 - v. Integrate data with search functionality.
 - b) Connect stakeholders to:
 - i. Enable users to find people including experts and potential partners.
 - ii. Support interaction with other users, for example to collaborate on scientific initiatives, share experiences, and coordinate action on a regular or ad hoc basis.
 - iii. Match make users with finance opportunities, policy solutions, and collaboration opportunities with users expressing complementary needs.
 - c) Identify gaps and help prioritize actions to:
 - i. Share policy benchmarks, gaps and assess impact of laws and other interventions.
 - ii. Help frame actions in the framework of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to address marine litter and plastic pollution through action plans, protocols, partnerships and other activities.
 - iii. Publish global, regional and national action plans and inform science policy linkages.
 - iv. Identify the location of legal and illegal landfills to help determine better policy, placement and manage waste efficiently.
 - d) Coordinate and guide action based on the best available information including:
 - i. Connecting stakeholders to each other and to collaborative projects, for immediate action and co-development of long-term solutions.
 - ii. Guiding policy makers to facilitate action through information on regulations, subsidies, and policies.
 - iii. Tracking where progress is made and help assess risk.
 - iv. Identifying and sharing good practices examples, case studies, and success stories, including those relevant to management practices and guidelines.
 - e) Facilitate target setting and measuring progress:
 - i. Towards policy goals including SDG indicators, various UNEA Resolutions, and other high-level targets. Stakeholders' commitments to, and progress towards such commitments.
 - ii. Towards measurable milestones, by enabling reporting through digital tools via data submission and national and local view.
8. To begin assessing key user communities and their needs, the Secretariat has identified an initial list of target audiences including local and national governments, the private sector, major stakeholders' groups, and others. The scope of the platform will be optimized further to the needs of stakeholders based on the feedback received from consultations.

3. Building on existing partnerships and initiatives

9. The platform will provide the digital arm of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML), a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together all actors working to prevent marine litter and microplastics. The GPML will coordinate with various potential partners and initiatives, and

identify and engage others in collaboration with the UN Science-Policy-Business Forum (UNSPBF) on the Environment. The UNSPBF, organized by UNEP and partners, is a platform designed to strengthen the science, policy and business interface and to accelerate positive change towards a circular economy and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The UNSPBF has and will continue to broker key partnerships for this important project. Furthermore, the platform will curate data and feed into the World Environment Situation Room.

10. A proof-of-concept prototype of the digital platform was developed in early 2020. The prototype currently includes:
 - a) Fully developed and publicly available tools and resources:
 - i. A Stock-taking online repository
 - ii. A Stock-taking interactive dashboard
 - iii. An Environmentally sound technologies platform, which identify techno-commercial solutions for the prevention of marine plastic litter, with a focus on macro plastics and using land-based (waste management) and near-shore (litter capturing) technologies for selected world regions.
 - b) Additional aspects under development:
 - i. the Microsite develop in partnership with IBM which provides access the AI virtual agent to answer all questions, the data analysis pilot, and a collaboration garage.
 - ii. the inventory of technical and financial resources interface
 - iii. the policy toolkit

4. Conceptual architecture of the digital platform

11. The foundations of the platform lay on three main components:
 - a) A virtual quarterdeck allowing users to access all functionalities of the platform through links to both internal and external databases.
 - b) Internal databases and other content which covers a variety of areas. Databases will provide access to data, knowledge, and information contained in the digital platform including but not limited to those generated on technical or financial resources, projects and tools from the stock-taking, action plans, capacity building and supporting technologies.
 - c) External datasets, which will allow users to access information from a collection of trusted external datasets accessible through application programming interface (APIs).

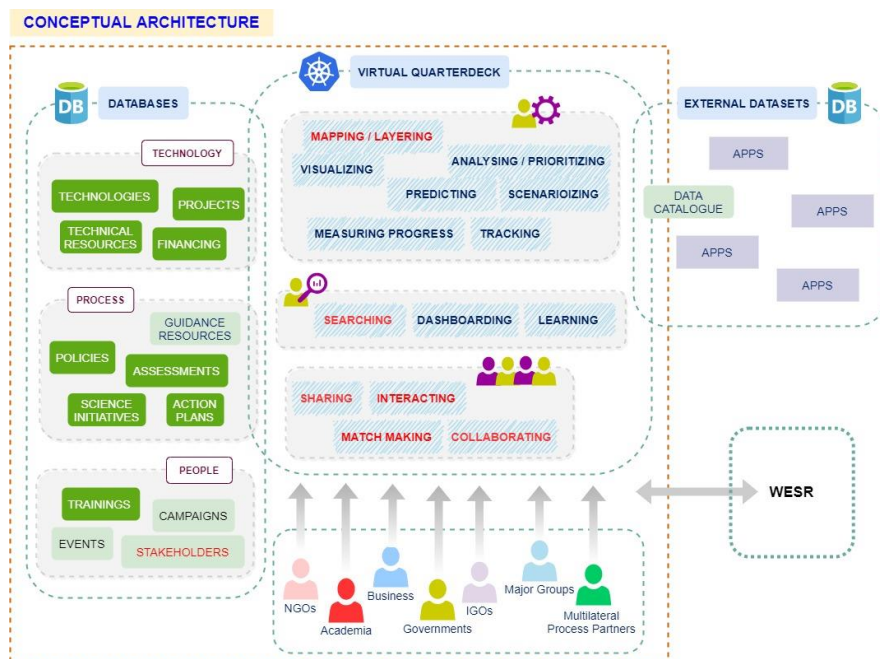


Figure 1: The conceptual architecture of the digital platform.

5. Next Steps

12. Preparations for the finalization of the prototyping phase (phase 1), to be launched in February 2021.
13. Providing a progress update on the GPML digital platform for UNEA-5.
14. An extensive consultation phase with user groups, to officially start after AHEG-4 and will end at the beginning of UNEA-5. Several discovery discussions have already taken place with potential partners who are also planning different types on digital platforms, databases and tools including but not limited to representatives from the Basel Convention, International Maritime Organization, the World Bank, PEW Research Centre, and the Alliance to End Plastic Waste to explore synergies and avoid duplication of effort.
15. Strengthening fundraising initiatives and formalizing a range of sponsorships and in-kind partnerships with a strategic, data, technology and knowledge focus.
16. Following the feedback received during the consultation phase, requirements will be finalized, and partners identified for phase 2 and ensuing phases of the digital platform.