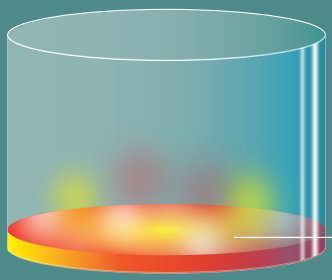
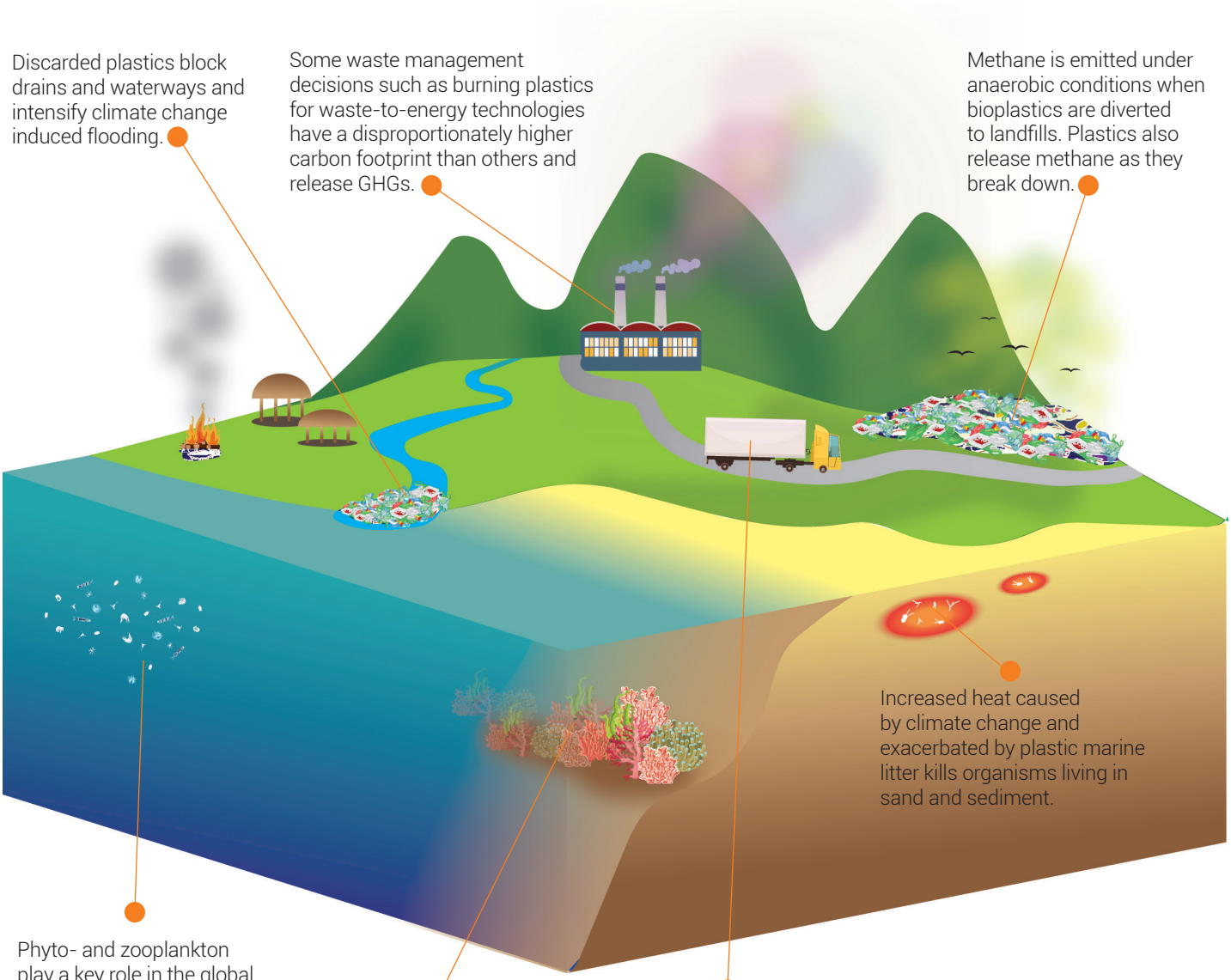
Plastics, Marine Litter, and Climate in the Pacific Region

Global plastics production is a significant contributor to climate change impacts in the Pacific Islands region. Ninety-nine percent of plastics come from fossil fuels, and plastics production is estimated to produce >400 million tonnes of greenhouse gases (GHGs) per year. This figure does not include emissions from waste management (including transport), mismanagement, and degradation of plastic products. Plastics pollution, including marine litter, magnifies climate impacts in the Pacific region and threatens the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.



CARBON BUDGET 2050

By 2050, it is estimated that GHG emissions from plastics could reach over 56 gigatons: 10–13 percent of the entire remaining carbon budget.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

An urgent and coordinated global response is needed that reflects the needs of the Pacific Islands as one of the regions most affected by climate change. The priority is for the world's major producers to cease the production of unnecessary and toxic fossil-fuel based plastics. Pacific Islands countries can also protect themselves by developing robust plastic pollution prevention policy frameworks which

- Restrict the importation of problematic plastics including pre-production pellets and plastic products
- Shorten plastics supply chains within the region
- Legislate container return schemes (prioritising reuse/ refill)
- Regulate the 'light weighting' of plastics[1]
- Legislate reverse logistics such as backhauling within the region
- Legislate extended producer responsibility schemes that repatriate post-consumer plastics back to site of production for responsible management outside the region
- Strengthen compliance and enforcement of waste dumping (including lost and discarded fishing gear)
- Ban waste-to-energy incineration

[1] 'Light weighting' becomes a false solution when it involves reducing the weight of each packaging unit while increasing overall production units. Light weighting can undermine the reusability and recycling and can distract from the need to scale refill and reuse models.

Further reading:

The Clean Seas Campaign on Marine Litter (UNEP)

Global Partnership on Marine Litter (UNEP)

Plastic and Climate Change: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet (CIEL)

UNEP's Beat Pollution Campaign

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