

Australia's comments on the selection of themes for UNEA 3

Australia thanks the Secretariat for the opportunity to provide comments on proposed themes for the UNEA-3. Australia sees value in all three themes proposed. However we believe UNEA-3 will be more successful and relevant with a single focus theme. Australia believes Theme 1: *A Pollution Free Planet* will enable UNEP to build on its existing strengths in this area and will resonate well with the High Level Political Forum. A solutions-oriented approach will be important for maximising the relevance and impact of UNEPs work on this theme.

We note that pollution is an important global issue and is being raised in a number of international fora, including UNEA resolution 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics, IUCN motion 52 on promoting a regional approach to tackle the global problem of marine debris, UNGA informal consultative process on oceans and the law of the sea and Sustainable Development Goal 14.1. There is value in providing further focus under the theme of Pollution Free Planet and we draw your attention to potential areas of focus which are of interest to Australia below.

- Stopping Marine Plastics at its Source – plastic is one of the most prevalent types of marine pollution and can affect marine species through entanglement, damage to habitats and ingestion. It may also accumulate pollutants. Discussing this specific topic would build on work undertaken through UNGA71, which had marine debris, plastics and microplastics as its topic for the informal consultative process on oceans and the law of the sea. Australia's submission to that process highlighted the need to stop marine plastic pollution at its source. It would also build on the recent UNEA 2 resolution 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics and IUCN motion 52 on promoting regional approaches to tackle the global problem of marine debris, which recognises the importance of stopping marine plastic pollution at its source. The discussion should include stopping marine plastics by:
 - Developing a more circular economy, including product design and recycling;
 - Conversion of waste to energy; and
 - Fisheries measures to prevent discharge of fishing gear.
- Towards Peak Garbage – this topic will focus on plastic pollution in the marine environment. The amount of plastic entering the ocean is increasing at an exponential rate. Once it enters the ocean, very little plastic is subsequently removed. It is projected that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish, by weight. Plastic will continue to accumulate in the ocean unless corrective and preventive policies are introduced. The design of these policies and the timing of their implementation will determine how much plastic pollution will accumulate before we reach peak garbage.
- Marine Debris –Marine debris has been observed to impact marine turtles at all stages of their life cycle, although the extent to which micro-plastics affect turtle's biology and reproductive success is not known. The Draft Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia identifies impacts from marine debris as the third highest priority requiring management.
- Quantifying Human Exposure to Pollutants – A number of countries have reporting systems for pollutant release. In Australia's case it is the National Pollutant Inventory. The data in these systems would be more useful if it was integrated with other datasets (e.g. factors that affect pollutant movement such as air and water movement) to provide information on human exposure to pollutants. It would also be useful to link datasets regionally.

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