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Marine Litter Flyer

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Marine litter

Background

Litter is found in all the world's oceans and seas, even in remote areas far from human contact and obvious sources of the problem. The continuous growth in the amount of solid waste thrown away, and the very slow rate of degradation of most items, are together leading to a gradual increase in marine litter found at sea, on the sea floor and coastal shores. Over 6.4 million tonnes of it are estimated to reach our oceans each year. It is an economic, environmental, human health and aesthetic problem posing a complex and multi-dimensional challenge.

Marine litter results from human behaviour, whether accidental or intentional. The greatest sources of it are land-based activities, including: wastes released from dumpsites near the coast or river banks; the littering of beaches; tourism and recreational use of the coasts; fishing industry activities; and ship-breaking yards. Storm-related events – like floods – flush the resulting wastes out to sea where they sink to the bottom or are carried on coastal eddies and ocean currents. The major sea-based sources include: abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear; shipping activities; and legal and illegal dumping.

All this can cause serious economic losses. Among the most seriously affected are coastal communities (increased expenditure on beach cleaning, public health and waste disposal), tourism (loss of income and bad publicity), shipping (costs associated with fouled propellers, damaged engines, removing litter and managing waste in harbours), fishing (reduced and lost catch, damaged nets and other fishing gear, fouled propellers and contamination), and fish farming and coastal aquaculture. Marine litter can also lead to loss of biodiversity and of ecosystem functions and services.

Causes are both cultural and multi-sectoral, resulting from poor practices in managing solid wastes, a lack of infrastructure, insufficient understanding among the public of the potential consequences of its actions, inadequate legal and enforcement systems and a shortage of financial resources.

Marine litter crosses boundaries and can only be tackled through regional and global collaboration

Marine debris is any persistent manufactured or processed solid material that - directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally – is disposed of, or abandoned, into the marine or coastal environment

UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter

In 2003, in response to this global challenge, UNEP's Regional Seas Programme and the Coordinating Office for the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), embarked on the 'Global Initiative on Marine Litter'. The initiative provides a platform for managing the problem through establishing partnerships and cooperative arrangements and coordinating joint activities. Its main partners include the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), government representatives, UN bodies, donor agencies, the private sector and NGOs at global, regional and national levels.

As part of the Global Initiative UNEP has supported and guided the development of twelve Regional Action Plans addressing the problem worldwide. Its 2009 report 'Marine Litter: A Global Challenge' was the first attempt ever to take a world-wide stock of marine litter levels across 12 different regions. Other publications focus on market-based instruments, monitoring guidelines and abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear - and are available at www.unep.org/marinelitter

The Fifth International Marine Debris Conference – a unique opportunity...

The Fifth International Marine Debris Conference (5IMDC) - held from March 20-25, 2011, in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA - was the first of its kind in over a decade. Organised by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States of America and UNEP, it recognised that marine debris is a trans-boundary issue which can only be managed through regional and global collaboration, and so brought together 440 participants from some 38 countries around the globe who can have a major impact in creating and implementing strategies to address the problem.

Conference participants - International marine debris researchers, natural resource managers, policy makers, industry representatives, the nongovernmental community, teachers, graduate students - refined and endorsed by acclamation the Honolulu Commitment, which outlines 12 actions to reduce marine litter. Participants also revised the Honolulu Strategy - a framework strategy to prevent, reduce and manage marine debris.

The 5IMDC provided an effective platform for strengthening regional and international cooperation, and allowed sharing of strategies, best practices and new ideas across borders, taking away lessons from others' experiences, and forging new alliances (www.5imdc.org).



The Honolulu Strategy - A Framework Strategy for the Prevention, Reduction and Management of Marine Debris

One key outcome of the conference will be the Honolulu Strategy, which will provide a framework for targeted activities that address the problem of marine debris and demonstrate measurable results. It will be a living document which can be evaluated and updated regularly to capture progress made and identify areas that need improvement. It is intended to be used by UNEP, NOAA and all members of the marine debris community to monitor efforts, and report on progress, at international marine debris conferences

It has three results-oriented themes.

- **Decreasing solid waste and fishing gear lost, or disposed of at sea:** Strategies and actions will focus on preventing debris from sea-based sources (vessels and platforms), including the maritime and fishing industries and recreational boating.
- **Minimising land-based debris in watersheds:** Strategies and actions will focus on preventing debris from land-based sources in watersheds.
- **Reducing the backlog of marine debris:** Strategies and actions will focus on removing existing marine debris from any source, including that found floating at sea, in the water column, attached to reefs or other habitat types, and washing up on beaches.

These activities will be supported and complemented by cross-cutting actions like improving global understanding of the scale, nature, and impact of marine debris. This will be focused on international cooperation on the research and monitoring needed to characterize the scale, nature, and impacts of marine debris - and on building a strong constituency for global action - and thus supports all the themes.



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