

Addressing marine plastics: A systemic approach

Recommendations for action

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Foreword



We live in a world with a high reliance on plastics. Since 1950, the global production of plastic has increased by an estimated 9 per cent and much of the world's plastic waste has found it its way into landfills and our oceans. This report seeks to address marine plastic pollution through providing a perspective on how a circular economy approach to the design, production, use and disposal of plastics can help keep our seas clean and healthy.

Such an approach requires us to keep plastics within the economy at their highest possible value so we do not see it so easily as waste. We need to explore innovative business models that use less plastic and if used, do so with maximum efficiency. We need to seek out and promote alternative products and materials and nudge consumers to make more sustainable choices.

The importance of shifting to more sustainable consumption and production patterns, and building more circularity in our economies was highlighted at the Fourth Session of the UN Environment Assembly. The United Nations Environment Programme is therefore working with countries in addressing the challenge of plastic pollution in a systemic way while collaborating with stakeholders, in order to close the tap and promote more sustainable practices in the consumption and production of plastics.

This report recommends actions that need to be taken by different stakeholders and sectors where plastic waste is substantial and impacts on the environment are high.

This report is the output of support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to address marine plastics. We deeply appreciate the support of GEF to its development. We hope this report will encourage further efforts to address plastic pollution and help build a future with clean seas.

Inger Andersen Executive Director United Nations Environment Programme

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Executive Summary

Addressing marine plastic pollution is an urgent action, considering the rising levels of plastics in the environment and the impacts to coastal and marine ecosystems. The problem of plastic pollution is crossboundary and cross-cutting, and it requires systemic solutions covering policy, technology, management, financing, knowledge and research, awareness raising and behaviour change. The Ministerial Declaration and resolutions of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its Fourth Session (UNEA-4) reinforce this understanding.¹

Building on the findings from two previous reports on stocktaking of the global plastic value chain and existing actions, this report identifies gaps to address marine plastics at each value chain stage, and finally recommends actions to achieve a circular economy for plastics at the global level.

Gaps to Address Plastic Pollution

Gaps in addressing plastic pollution exist in various aspects, including knowledge, policy, technology, financing and awareness. More specifically:

Gaps in knowledge around marine plastics include: stocks and flows of macro- and microplastics in the oceans, the environmental and socio-economic exchange platform to address plastic pollution can facilitate knowledge generation and exchange, as requested in Resolution 4/6 of UNEA-4 on Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/Res.6).

- Numerous national and regional initiatives have been implemented around the world, but gaps in policy remain. In particular, coordinated policies, agreements and action plans to support implementation of upstream solutions (acting from upper stages of the value chain by applying sustainable consumption and production, such as eco-design, product lifetime extension, and innovative business model etc.), improve recyclability, incentivise demand for recycled plastics, and streamline downstream plastic management are lacking and/or non-binding in most countries and regions. There is also a need for increased global policy coordination, including regulations on chemicals and waste related to plastic pollution.
- Gaps in technology and innovation are evident across the plastics value chain. Standards and guidelines for reuse and recycling are lacking.
 There is a need for designing and producing plastic products with lower impacts in use and end-of-life

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