



# Actions to address Plastic Waste

## Basel Convention

on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal

**In May 2019, Governments amended annexes of the Basel Convention to specifically include plastic waste in a legally-binding framework which will make global trade in plastic waste more transparent and better regulated.**

### Plastic waste – A global problem

Rapidly increasing levels of plastic waste pose a serious global environmental problem. For example, marine litter negatively affects marine biodiversity, ecosystems, fisheries, maritime transport, tourism, and local societies and economies. Microplastics can be found in our food, water and even in the air we breathe. Only 9 % of the plastic waste produced to date has been recycled. Over the last ten years, we have produced more plastics than during the whole last century.

Plastic pollution can arise at all stages of the life-cycle and may pose a threat to human health and the environment. Plastics may also contain hazardous substances, including Persistent Organic Pollutants. Target 14.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals requires to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

Poorly developed waste management systems in large parts of the world remain a key challenge. Meanwhile, the plastic waste challenge also needs to be tackled at source. Steps promoting the prevention and minimization of the generation of plastic waste, where technically and economically feasible, are critical.

### Why the Basel Convention?

The Basel Convention is the most comprehensive global environmental treaty on hazardous and other wastes. The control of transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes is one of the corner stones of the Convention. Export and import of wastes covered by the Convention is subject to certain conditions and procedures. Parties are obliged to take measures to ensure that the generation of such wastes is reduced to a minimum, and that adequate disposal facilities for the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes and other wastes is available in the receiving country.

In 2019, the Basel Convention Conference of the Parties (COP) adopted two important decisions to address plastic waste, namely the adoption of the Plastic Waste Amendment, and a decision setting out a range of further actions to address plastic waste under the Basel Convention. These steps have strengthened the Basel Convention as the only global legally-binding instrument to specifically address plastic waste.



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## The Plastic Waste Amendment

In May 2019, by decision BC-14/12, the COP amended Annexes II, VIII and IX to the Basel Convention to change the scope of plastic waste covered by the Convention. These amendments will have a significant impact on the rules governing the movement of plastic waste across international boundaries.

Certain types of plastic waste, namely those that are difficult to recycle (listed in Annex II) or are hazardous (listed in Annex VIII), will only be allowed to be exported if the importing country grants a Prior Informed Consent (PIC). This PIC has to secure that the waste will be managed in an environmentally sound manner in the importing country. Technical guidelines for the environmentally sound management (ESM) of plastic waste are currently under development and to be agreed under the Basel Convention. Non-hazardous, clean and sorted plastic waste destined for recycling in an environmentally sound manner (listed in Annex IX) can be traded without applying the PIC procedure. The amendments as such do not imply a ban on the import, transit or export of plastic waste.

These new entries will be effective as of 1 January 2021. The text of the amendments can be found at:

<http://www.basel.int/tabid/6069/Default.aspx>.

## Further actions to address plastic waste under the Basel Convention

In decision to BC-14/13, Parties noted the importance and urgency of the problem of plastic waste and decided to take immediate action:

### 1. *Minimization/prevention of plastic waste:*

The COP emphasized the need to adopt a life-cycle approach, called upon Parties to make further efforts at the domestic level, and encouraged Parties to set time-bound targets.

### 2. *Reducing the risk from hazardous constituents:*

Plastic waste may contain hazardous substances. The COP strongly encouraged Parties and others to make effort to create new technology and processes to reduce the use of hazardous constituents in the production of plastics.

### 3. *Review of Annexes I and III to the Basel Convention:*

The COP requested the expert working group on the review of annexes to consider whether any additional constituents or characteristics in relation to plastic waste should be added to Annex I or III to the Convention.

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### 4. *Technical guidelines:*

The COP decided to update 'the technical guidelines for the identification and ESM of plastic waste and for their disposal' and decided to establish a small intersessional working group to undertake this work.

### 5. *Partnership on Plastic Waste:*

The COP decided to establish the working group of the Partnership on Plastic Waste and adopted the terms of reference and workplan for 2020-2021. Its goal is to improve and promote the environmentally sound management of plastic waste at the global, regional and national levels and prevent and minimize their generation so as to reduce significantly and in the long-term eliminate the discharge of plastic waste and microplastics into the environment, in particular the marine environment

### 6. *Public awareness:*

The COP invited Parties and others to enhance public awareness, education and information exchange.



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