



Marine plastic litter and microplastics

Basel Convention

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

Key challenges faced:

Marine plastic litter is an environmental problem occurring on a global scale today.

The ubiquitous transboundary movement of marine plastics and microplastics is becoming a major concern as their property of durability makes their debris remain intact for long period of time throughout the ocean.

Global plastic production has increased steadily and has reached 320 million tonnes a year. Of the estimated 6.3 billion tonnes of plastic waste produced since the 1950s, only 9% has been recycled and another 12% incinerated. 95% of disposable plastic packaging is wasted.

The greatest burden of plastic waste entering the sea is likely to arise where waste collection systems are ineffective or even non-existent.

Developing countries in particular may face challenges in managing the rapidly growing volume of plastic waste.

Developed countries may face challenges if they have not developed sufficient capacity to dispose of plastic waste and rely on the continued availability of recycling capacity in other States.

Why Basel Convention?

The Basel Convention covers many issues which are at the heart of preventing and minimizing the generation of wastes including those ending up in the ocean. Much of the marine litter and microplastics found in the sea may be determined as 'waste' as defined under the Convention, although not all will necessarily fall within the definition.

Marine litter is a transboundary issue. Parties are to take measures to ensure that the generation of hazardous wastes and other wastes is reduced to a minimum; and to ensure the availability of adequate disposal facilities for the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes and other wastes.

Stockholm Convention on POPs:

The Stockholm Convention aims to protect human health and the environment from POPs (organic chemicals that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in humans and wildlife, have harmful effects and have the potential for long-range environmental transport). As of 2018, the Convention controls 28 POPs, including those which have been used as additives, flame retardants or plasticizers in plastics. Plastics can adsorb POPs such as PCB, DDT and dioxins and these are frequently detected in marine plastic litter.



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Guidance under the Basel Convention:

The following guidance addressing issues related to marine plastic litter and microplastics have been developed:

- Technical guidelines for the identification and environmentally sound management (ESM) of plastic wastes and for their disposal (UNEP/CHW.6/21)
- Framework for the ESM of hazardous wastes and other wastes (decision BC-11/1)
- Guidance to assist Parties in developing efficient strategies for achieving the prevention and minimization of the generation of hazardous and other wastes and their disposal (UNEP/CHW.13/INF/11)
- Practical manuals for the promotion of the ESM (UNEP/CHW.13/4/Add.1)
- Draft practical manuals on extended producer responsibility and financing systems for ESM (UNEP/CHW.13/INF/8)
- Guidance manual on how to improve the sea-land interface (UNEP/CHW.13/INF/37)

SDGs and the issue of marine:

Several Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to the issue of marine litter, for example:

- Target 11.6 on municipal and other waste;
- Target 12.4 on the environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes;
- Target 12.5 on substantially reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse;
- Target 14.1 on reducing marine pollution including marine debris.

International response:

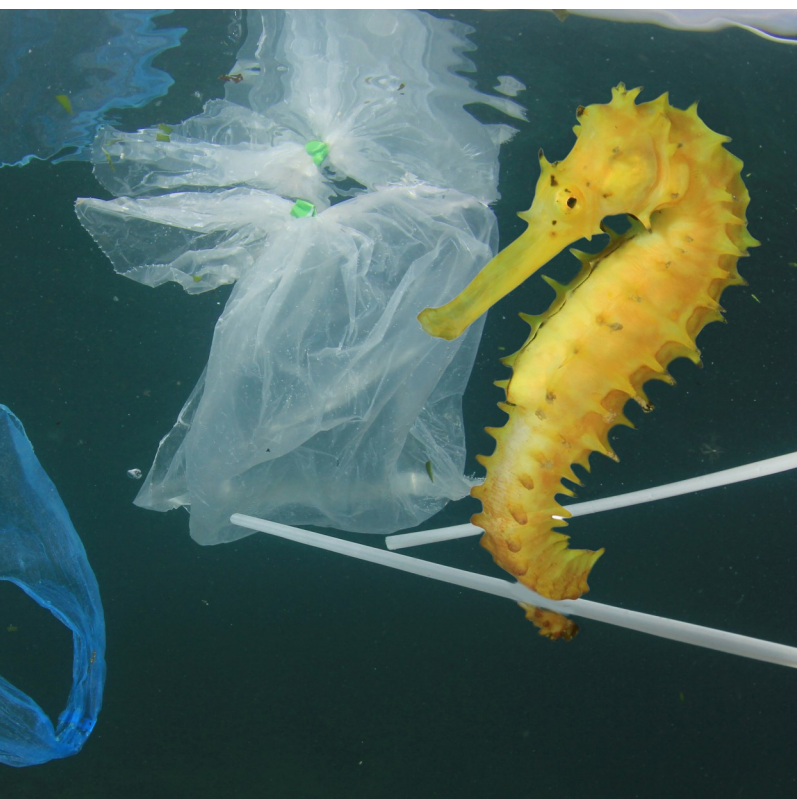
In 2016, UNEA recognised that they are a rapidly increasing serious issue of global concern that needs an urgent global response. Many other international organizations and partnerships have expressed similar concerns and have called for action.

The Global Marine Litter Partnership operated as a key actor since its launch in June 2012 at Rio+20 in Brazil, bringing together international agencies, governments, academia, the private sector, civil society and individuals.

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Work under the Basel Convention:

In 2017, the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention decided that its subsidiary body, the Open-ended Working Group consider relevant options available under the Convention to further address marine plastic litter and microplastics.

The regional centres of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions were encouraged to work on the impact of plastic waste, marine plastic litter, microplastic, and measures for prevention and environmentally sound management.

Furthermore, Parties established the Partnership on Household Waste, through which the environmentally sound management of household wastes including plastics will be further explored.

