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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

**The Strategic Approach and the sound management of
chemicals and waste beyond 2020**

**A submission from the United Nations Environment Programme:
United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on marine
litter and microplastics and the relevance to the Strategic
Approach to International Chemicals Management**

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat has the honour to circulate, in the annex to the present note, a submission from United Nations Environment Programme on the United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on marine litter and microplastics and the relevance to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. The document is presented in the annex as received from the United Nations Environment Programme and has not been edited by the secretariat.

* SAICM/OEWG.3/1.

Annex

Briefing note on the United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on marine litter and microplastics and relevant to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management

This briefing note highlights the key issues relevant to the implementation of the UN Environment Assembly resolutions on marine litter and microplastics (UNEP/EA.1/6, UNEP/EA.2/11, UNEP/EA.3/7 and UNEP/EA.4/L.7).¹

1) Background

The United Nations Environment Programme has since 1995, through the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of Marine Litter on Land-based Activities and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (2012) has been a leading actor in the global and normative efforts to reduce marine litter and microplastics and assisting developing countries in developing their responses and prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment. A priority area of focus is the implementation of the four marine litter resolutions adopted by UN Environment Assembly namely 1/6: Marine plastic debris and microplastics (2014); 2/11: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2016); 3/7: Marine litter and microplastics (2017); and 4/L.7 Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2019). The Global Partnership on Marine Litter has been highlighted as a key platform for improved coordination and cooperation and the most recent resolution took note of the framework document of the partnership².

The third session of the UN Environment Assembly stressed the importance of a zero vision i.e. long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics. It further urged all actors to step up actions to “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”. An Ad hoc open-ended experts group on marine litter and microplastics was established to provide options for future work to the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly³. Amongst the options identified for enhanced coordination and governance, the group proposed:

- a. Consider strengthening coordination at the global level through existing partnerships and mechanisms working on marine litter and related issues, such as the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the **Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management**, and broadening their scope; and, if necessary, consider the feasibility and effectiveness of a potential new coordinating structure building on existing initiatives;

The experts agreed that there was a need to strengthen the science-policy interface at the international level and to do more to support evidence-based approaches, improve understanding of the impacts of plastic litter on the marine environment, and promote local, national, regional and global action to eliminate marine litter. Options included:

- b. Consider modalities for the establishment of a global knowledge hub which could, inter alia, make it possible to develop harmonized monitoring methodologies; to collect, collate and openly share global monitoring data and information from all actors and sources, including citizen science; to ensure access to robust, reliable science and sound scientific practices, **such as on additives**;
- c. Explore an interagency examination of **health** and environmental aspects in relation to marine litter and microplastics and plastic with a source-to-sea approach as well as an examination of costs and benefits in relation to job transition;
- d. Consider preparing a compendium of relevant existing and planned industry initiatives, including on product design, standards, innovation, production quantities **and additives**, to enhance transparency and calibrate partnership opportunities, as well as examples of existing national-level actions such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) to supplement the compendium.

¹ The UNEA 4 resolution on marine litter and microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/L.7) may be found at the following link: <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4>

² https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1900241_-_framework_document_for_the_gpml_-_advance.pdf

³ <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1804167.pdf#overlay-context=pre-session-unea4>

The fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly held in March 2019 adopted resolution 4/L7 (Annex 1) which requested UNEP to:

Operative Paragraph 2: within available resources and benefiting from the work of relevant existing mechanisms, to immediately strengthen scientific and technological knowledge with regard to marine litter including marine plastic litter and microplastics through the following activities: (a) Convening existing relevant science advisory initiatives with input from the Member States, as appropriate, to provide input into the activities under paragraph 3 and 7; (b) Compiling available scientific and other relevant data and information to prepare an assessment on sources, pathways, **and hazards** of litter including plastic litter and microplastic pollution and its presence in the rivers and oceans, scientific knowledge about adverse effects on ecosystems, **potential adverse effects on human health** and environmentally sound technology innovations; (c) Recommending indicators to harmonize monitoring, report and assess methodologies, taking into account the key sources of marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics in cooperation with relevant international organizations; (d) Gathering information with a view to inform policies and action on environmentally sound technological innovations, options and measures for reducing risks of discharges of litter including plastic litter and microplastics to the marine environment taking into account the whole life-cycle of plastics, in support of local, national, regional and global action;

Operative Paragraph 3: strengthen coordination and cooperation by establishing, within available resources, and building on existing initiatives, a multi-stakeholder platform within UNEP, to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination of discharges of litter and microplastics through a life cycle approach, into the oceans. This may include the following functions: (a) Serving as a forum for governments, industry, academia, civil society, and other stakeholders to share experiences and coordinate action, either on a regular or ad hoc basis; (b) Serving as a repository for: assessments on how land and sea-based sources of marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics are addressed at national, regional and international levels, conceptual and practical guidance materials for governments, organizations, and private entities to address aspects of marine litter; and current action plans, management practices, and guidelines for enabling, enhancing and supporting action to prevent discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment; (c) Raising global awareness of the issue with a wide variety of audiences, such as governments, policy-makers, resource managers, educators, private sector entities, and the public; (d) Establishing and maintaining a database of technical and scientific information related to marine litter, such as inventories of discharges to the marine environment, scientific studies, and innovations to address marine litter; (e) Promoting collaboration among relevant existing science mechanisms to facilitate access to available scientific data and information to disseminate sound scientific practices, such as guidelines for the sampling and analysis of marine macro-plastics and microplastics and to improve policy relevance of research; (f) Promoting action in Regional Seas Conventions and Programmes, within available resources, to address marine litter through action plans, protocols, partnerships, and other activities;

Operative Paragraph 10: through its 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, to elaborate guidelines on plastic use and production in order to inform consumers, including on standards and labels, to incentivize businesses and retailers to commit to sustainable practices and products, and to support governments to promote the use of information tools and incentives to foster sustainable consumption and production;

Operative Paragraph 7: Decides to extend until UNEA-5 the mandate of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics created by resolution UNEP/EA.3/res.7, building on its previous work, to: (a) Take stock of existing activities and actions towards long-term elimination of discharges into the oceans, to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics by governments, relevant global and regional instruments and international organizations, the private sector, Non-Governmental organizations and other relevant contributors; (b) Identify technical and financial resources or mechanisms for supporting countries in addressing marine plastic litter and microplastics; (c) Encourage partnerships as well as increased cooperation in relations to the prevention of marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics that undertake activities, such as development of source inventories, improvement of waste management, awareness raising, and promotion of innovation; (d) Analyse the effectiveness of existing and potential response options and activities on marine litter and microplastics at all levels to determine the contribution in solving the global problem;

Operative Paragraph 8: Invites the Environment Management Group (EMG) to engage in and contribute to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics by providing inter alia a mapping of all relevant United Nations agencies, programmes, initiatives and expertise with relevance to marine litter including plastic litter and microplastics;

2) Potential relevance to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

While the scope of SAICM today is broad and currently does not expressly address marine plastic litter or microplastics, there are opportunities for cooperative action, including in scientific information, lifecycle assessments and circularity, addressing chemicals additives in plastics, engagement with downstream user along the plastic value chain, capacity building and in promoting innovation in plastic product design. Emerging policy issues related to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, nanomaterials and the promotion of chemicals related information within product value chains are relevant to aspects of marine litter and microplastics management and prevention.

There is also relevance in relation to the broader management of chemical additives used in the manufacturing of plastics and end-of life processes (e.g. recycling).

SAICM stakeholders may wish to consider (in close coordination with relevant chemicals and waste related conventions, initiatives and policy approaches):

- 1) Contributing information to and be involved in strengthening scientific and technological knowledge with regard to marine litter including marine plastic litter and microplastics by: (a) Recommend relevant existing science advisory initiatives as appropriate to provide input into the activities under paragraphs 3 and 7 of the UNEA resolution; (b) Engage in the preparation of the assessment on sources, pathways, **and hazards** of litter including plastic litter and microplastic pollution, **potential adverse effects on human health** and environmentally sound technology innovations;
- 2) Continue to engage in the meetings of the Ad hoc open-ended experts group with input from a broader chemicals management perspective;
- 3) Continue to share information on work relevant to marine litter and microplastics through for example the online platform outlined in operative paragraph 3 and the mapping planned under operative paragraph 8;
- 4) Joining⁴ and consider coordination activities through e.g. the Global Partnership on Marine Litter as highlighted in resolutions 1/6, 2/11 and 3/7;
- 5) Address the linkages between plastic pollution being a land and sea-based issue and marine plastic litter.
- 6) Consider the issue of marine litter, including marine plastic litter and microplastics and its relevance in the context of SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020;
- 7) Reflect on any potential role of the SAICM secretariat on the issue of marine litter including marine plastic litter and microplastics.

⁴ <http://marinelitternetwork.com/join-us/>