

First Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment

Opening Plenary – Statement by Australia

Thank you Chair, and may I congratulate you on your appointment.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Government of Uruguay and the community of Punta del Este, for so graciously hosting this negotiating session.

Excellencies and fellow delegates – Australia welcomes the opportunity to work with you all this week as we take the first steps together to develop a new international binding agreement to end plastic pollution.

We welcome the broad cross section of stakeholders represented in the multi-stakeholder dialogue – including business, scientists, civil society, non-government organisations and the informal sector. Australia also recognises the continuing connection to land and culture of First Nations peoples across the world, and the importance of their participation and contributions to this process.

We all have a vested interest in a safe circular economy and the end of plastic pollution.

Plastic's unique characteristics have been revolutionary in our global development. Its properties have led to it being one of the most prevalent human-made products on earth. It serves important functions in medicine, keeps food fresh and reduces transportation costs.

But the simple truth is that we are using plastic in an unsustainable way.

Like other nations, Australia faces domestic challenges of using too much plastic that is designed for short term consumption. While it takes only a moment for plastics to enter the environment, the impacts can last for centuries.

As an island nation, Australia experiences the impacts of the shared problem of marine plastic pollution. We see too often the devastating impacts that plastic pollution has on our marine mammals, fish and birdlife.

For our Pacific neighbours, marine plastic pollution is a significant environmental, health and economic development problem. It degrades natural ecosystems and threatens food security.

Australia is committed to strong action to transition to a more circular plastics economy.

- We have stopped the export of unprocessed plastic waste to ensure that Australia's waste does not cause environmental and human health problems elsewhere
- We are eliminating problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic products
- We are reforming our regulation of packaging to drive a greater focus on design and alignment with circular economy principles
- And we are expanding our recycling capacity and investing in new and exciting technology to revolutionise plastic recycling and to develop more sustainable alternatives to plastics.

To support our national efforts, Australia seeks an ambitious global agreement on plastic pollution and is delighted to have recently announced our membership of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution.

We seek an instrument that supports ambitious action on plastic pollution across the entire life cycle of plastics.

The instrument should support a safe circular economy, eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastics, and accelerate international efforts to remove harmful chemicals from product supply chains.

The instrument should support national-level actions, complemented by clear, transparent global requirements where necessary.

We look forward to working with you this week to take the first steps in agreeing the foundation elements of the treaty and prioritising workstreams for us to progress out of session.

This INC process provides a unique opportunity to align the efforts of our governments, civil society, business, scientists and others towards our goal to finalise an instrument by 2024 to end plastic pollution.

Thank you.