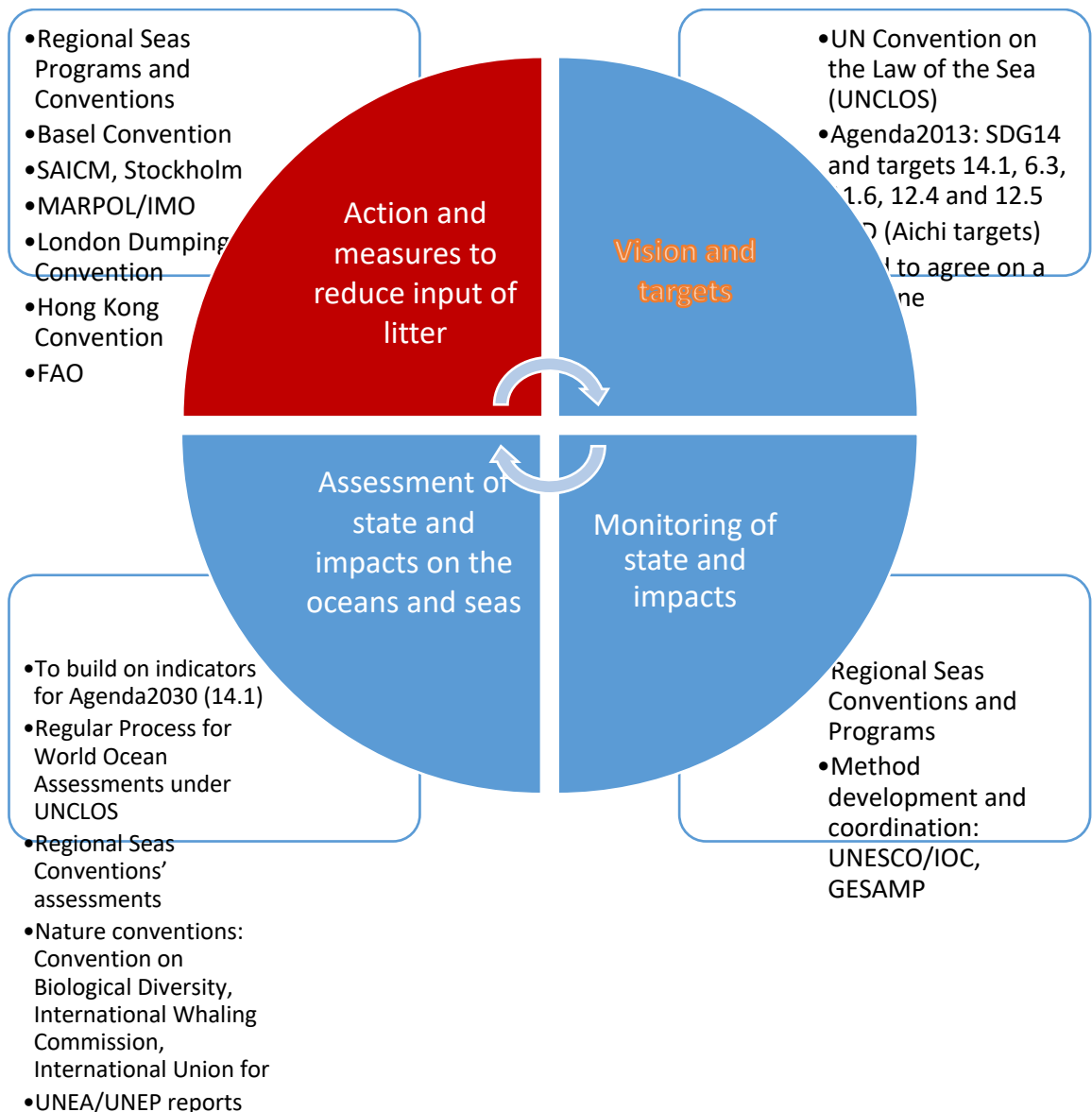


Finland's expert input: Towards a holistic global governance architecture for preventing inputs of marine litter and microplastics to the oceans and seas

The currently fragmented global governance related to management of inputs of marine litter and microplastics has gaps and probably also overlaps and needs remodelling. Existing instruments and frameworks offer a good starting point to build on but they necessitate strong coordination and cooperation among them, plus filling in the remaining gaps. We consider that this could be done via a platform or a forum as indicated e.g. by Sweden in their input. At this stage we would not either rule out the possibility that a framework underpinning the platform or elements of it would be legally binding or be underpinned by an internationally negotiated framework convention or agreement. However, if such negotiations were to be initiated parallel swift action on marine litter is necessary in the short term. It is necessary to cover both land-based and sea-based sources. Components of such a structure should consist at least of the following themes:

- i. A vision/goal with a timeframe and possibly more specific targets for reducing litter input to the sea and oceans
- ii. Monitoring of the state and impacts of litter and microplastics in the sea and oceans
- iii. Assessment of the state and impacts of marine litter in the sea and oceans
- iv. Actions and measures to prevent input of litter to the marine environment, addressing the full life-cycle of plastics, including coordination, financing and accountability (regarding this component we support working further on the ideas put forward by Norway and Sweden as well as the civil society).

Various existing instruments and organisations already contribute to these themes (Figure) and coordination among them is necessary. It is necessary to use and build on existing frameworks especially for a strong short-term strong action.



Vision and targets could be built upon existing commitments

UN Convention on the Law of the Sea should be recognized as the overall legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources.

The approach should be inherently connected to Agenda2030 SDGs and targets. SDG14 Underwater life and target 14.1 addressing pollution, including marine litter could be employed to serve as the basis of the vision/goal. However, the vision/goals necessitates a timeline.

Impacts from marine litter might deserve a target(s) on their own and Aichi targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity might assist in setting impact targets.

ii. Monitoring of state and impacts of marine litter in the sea

Monitoring is necessary to gain knowledge regarding the quantity of litter and microplastics entering the sea and causing harmful impacts on the ecosystem. Monitoring is also necessary to be able to follow-up on the effectiveness of measures.

Monitoring in regional seas is often coordinated by regional seas organisations and UNESCO/IOC with its incoming Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainability 2021-2031 ought to be connected to the process and could provide guidance on monitoring of marine litter.

Methodology is complex and harmonization is necessary to enable comparable assessments.

The experience on data, monitoring and assessments from HELCOM which has a good set of indicators, regular assessments and coordinated monitoring prompts to suggest that first step towards discussing harmonization of monitoring would be to agree on the data products, i.e., what questions should the indicators and assessments answer. The needed data products can be used as a starting point and to anchor the discussion on monitoring, methods, data handling, etc.

iii. Assessment of state and impacts of marine litter in the sea

Status indicators and/or assessments are necessary to estimate whether actions and measures are producing wanted results. Assessments would cover inputs of litter and microplastics entering the seas, quantities and quality of marine litter in different compartments of the sea (sea surface, water column, sea floor) and impacts on organisms (entangling, ingestion, etc.). Defining the indicators and assessments should drive setting up harmonized monitoring.

UN DOALOS is responsible for the “Regular Process” which is currently compiling the second World Ocean Assessment. Regional Seas organisations carry out important assessment work such as HELCOM with its recently published State of the Baltic Sea Report (HOLAS II) or OSPAR with its Quality Status Reports. Obviously, also GESAMP is carrying out important work too.

In the future work, a sub-group of experts could be tasked with developing a roadmap for harmonized assessment products and monitoring.

iv. Actions and measures to prevent input of litter

This is where the Swedish proposal comes in and should be discussed further. We however feel that other organisations should have stronger precedence in the coordination platform than only Regional Seas Conventions and Basel Convention. Probably the whole life-cycle of plastics need to be addressed in one way or another but the process should not lose sight of marine litter.

Land-based marine litter is only part of the story and in some areas of such as the Pacific and the Atlantic, sea-based litter from fishing vessels and also lost cargo from merchant ships is a more significant source. Hence, a holistic approach to global management needs to embrace also those organization which deal with sea-based marine litter such as IMO (MARPOL Convention) and FAO (e.g. guidance related to fishing gear). IMO will consider in its MEPC73 meeting elements for an IMO action plan on marine plastic litter from ships. Furthermore, London Dumping Convention and Protocol is another framework that relates to sea-based litter.

Yet another aspect that might be considered is sea-based measures for of the ocean. Although we consider clean-up measures at sea secondary to the reduction of inputs, they probably need to be addressed in one way or another as well, but prevention should be the utmost first target.

v. Coordination

All of the above should be included in a holistic governance framework and following tasks of a coordination platform or forum.