

General Statement – United States of America – Nov 18, 2019

An estimated 150 million metric tons of marine plastic waste currently exists in the oceans, with roughly 8 million metric tons entering every year. The United States agrees with other countries represented here on the urgent need to mitigate the flow of plastic, as well as all types of marine litter, into the oceans.

To address this complex problem, the United States advocates for three pillars: (1) improving domestic integrated waste management, including recycling capacity, prevention and reduction; (2) creating value for recyclable plastic scrap through strengthening secondary markets for recycled materials; and (3) supporting innovation in all aspects of the plastics supply chain.

We know that inadequate solid waste collection and management are a root cause of marine plastic litter and microplastics. We therefore believe the search for solutions to this problem should focus on environmentally sound solid waste management and sustainable management of materials. We believe much more can be done to help countries improve outcomes in this area.

Relatedly, we should incentivize plastic recycling, and build up global recycling capacity, while avoiding unnecessary disruptions in recycling supply chains. There is strong and growing consumer demand for recycled content in materials used on a daily basis.

Sea-based sources of marine plastic litter, such as abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear, is another important issue and we encourage continued work through the FAO.

We recognize that stakeholders are key to helping find solutions, including through innovation. The proliferation of marine plastic litter and microplastics is a global challenge requiring international collaboration and engagement among the public sector, and industry and civil society stakeholders.

In implementing its mandate from UNEA Resolutions 3/7 and 4/6, the AHEG should consider the rapidly growing voluntary commitments from private sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships like the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, the Trash Free Seas Alliance, Think Beyond Plastic, New Plastics Economy, Circulate Capital and Ocean Conservancy, Marine Litter Solutions, and many others.

We would also like to draw attention to work done in the G20 and the adoption of a marine plastic litter implementation framework. We should look to Japan's presidency for information and lessons learned that can inform this process.

All countries should take responsibility for the leakage of plastics into the ocean. We should look to large-source countries and focus our efforts in areas where they stand to have the greatest impact. At the same time, we should avoid overburdening all countries with arduous recommendations or prescriptive one-size fits all measures.

Finally, we would like to remind this group of our mandate as set out in relevant paragraphs of UNEA Resolutions 3/7 and 4/6. Our job is to provide information for UNEA to consider. We have heard others advocating for specific policy recommendations, which in our view exceeds the mandate of this group. Additionally, we believe that moving forward this group should structure its work in a way that allows UNEA members to provide input on important organizational matters. By the same token, members should be given the opportunity to review meeting documents, including surveys and reports, well in advance of the meeting as contemplated in the UNEA Rules of Procedure.