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Written Submission from Our Sea of East Asia Network on Substantive Issues and Content for the Forum

Our Sea of East Asia Network (OSEAN) would like to remind Member States and stakeholders that the ultimate goal of resolution 5/14, “End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument,” is to stop plastic pollution throughout its entire life cycle. To achieve the mandate set out in the resolution, plastics must be addressed as a material, not merely as a product, and categorically removed particularly in vulnerable areas already under tremendous threat from insurmountable plastic pollution. One of these vulnerable areas is our ocean. As noted in the preamble, *specific impact of plastic pollution on the marine environment* is a major concern and this effectively requires marine plastics to be treated as a substantive issue. Therefore, **INC-1 must place the issue of marine plastic pollution as a priority and call to convene a dedicated working group on marine plastics with a predominant focus on fishing gears.**

While actual numbers are indeterminable, 5.7% of all fishing nets, 8.6% of all traps, and 29% of all lines are lost globally every year (Richardson et al., 2019). A cursory look in terms of percentages may make this data seem insignificant, but in reality this means that millions of tons of fishing gears are discarded or lost in the ocean every year. Aside from the toxins that these plastic fishing gears leach into the ocean, these ghost gears impact marine life with life-threatening entanglement and ingestion that undoubtedly accelerate the loss of endangered species and many others that are rapidly dwindling. In addition, ghost gears also pose navigational difficulties and hazards to seafarers and cause substantial damage to vessels (Hong et al., 2017). Efforts to curb illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by the WTO and support for gear-marking by FAO and IMO are commendable, but their lingering loopholes and gaps leave much to be desired. A dedicated working group comprising a multitude of stakeholders from different sectors will be required to take on a comprehensive approach to address discarded and lost fishing gears, and this must be determined during the early stages of the entire INC process.

Lastly, a forum adequately exploring the benefits of mainstreaming reuse, refill, and repair will help create the momentum needed to overcome government and industry inertia. Along with refusing and reducing plastics, expanding reuse, refill, and repair are indispensable systemic changes that must be in place to end plastic pollution. In other words, recycling alone will never amount to a true circular economy. Highlighting these essential elements of a true circular economy will be a pertinent topic for a forum and will help galvanize all stakeholders involved in the INCs.

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