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**Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group  
on Marine Litter and Microplastics  
Third meeting**

Bangkok, 18–22 November 2019

Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

Introduction to activities under the mandate of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group: Stocktaking

**Approach for the stocktaking of existing activities and actions  
towards long-term elimination of discharges into the oceans, to  
reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics by relevant  
contributors**

**Note by the Secretariat**

1. The Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group (AHEG) was established through the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution UNEP/EA.3/Res.7 paragraph 10. Its mandate was extended through resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 paragraph 7, which also requested the group to, amongst other things, through subparagraph 7(a):

*“Take stock of existing activities and action by governments, regional and global instruments, international organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other relevant contributors to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics with the aim of the long-term elimination of discharge into the oceans”*

2. This document aims to outline the approach for the preparation of such a stocktaking exercise and is presented to the Third Meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHEG 3) for discussion and consideration. The ultimate objective of the stocktaking exercise is to establish the extent of activities and their potential impact in the long-term on the elimination of discharges into the oceans and reduction of marine plastic litter and microplastics. The stocktaking exercise will be aligned with the methodology for the preparation of an analysis of the effectiveness of existing and potential response options and activities at all levels mandated under UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 subparagraph 7(d) and described in Working Document UNEP/AHEG/2019/3/5. The results of the stocktaking will aim to ascertain the present focus of current and desired response options and activities and identify gaps in these across the four major areas to inform the design of future initiatives. The stocktaking approach may be revised based on feedback received from consultations at the AHEG 3 in order to ensure it adequately responds to the request set out in subparagraph 7(a).

\* UNEP/AHEG/2019/3/1

## Introduction

3. The stocktaking exercise has been prepared with the aim of gathering information on ongoing and planned activities by stakeholder groups that deal with marine litter and microplastics directly and indirectly. It is expected that the initial results will inform the discussions at the Third Meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics in Bangkok 18-22 November 2019 and will assist in building the long-term capacity that would allow for a more strategic engagement in the overall process, including identification of areas with the greatest transformative potential.
4. The stocktaking exercise is intended to ascertain the level of progress made by stakeholder groups in taking action towards long-term elimination of discharges into the oceans and the reduction of marine plastic litter and microplastics, starting from 2018. The stocktaking will take place in two phases:
  - (a) Phase 1 (October-November 2019) will primarily focus on activities and actions by governments, due to their central role in regulating the life cycle of plastic goods and related services, and the private sector, for being the main actors in operating the life cycle of plastics.
  - (b) Phase 2 (December 2019 – May 2020) will thereafter broaden the focus to all contributors listed in subparagraph 7(a) of UNEA Resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6, namely regional and global instruments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant contributors.
5. The output of the stocktaking exercise will be a stocktaking report with a situational analysis of *inter alia* three major categories of actions (normative, evidential, and capacity building) and four cross-cutting themes (life cycle phase, environmental zone, geographic range and reporting/compliance) showing the distribution and focus of the actions being undertaken and where there are gaps.
6. The results will also feed into the analysis of the effectiveness of existing and potential response options mandated under UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 operative subparagraph 7(d) and described in Working Document UNEP/AHEG/2019/3/5.

## Approach and methodology for stocktaking

7. An online survey will be prepared and circulated first to member states and major groups and stakeholders, as per phase 1 described under paragraph 2(a) above, and the results will provide the first level of data input for the stocktaking exercise. The survey will consist of questions relating to the different aspects of each action and activity submitted. These include *inter alia* geographic range across the source-to-sea zones (mountains, rivers, water catchments, coastal zones, maritime areas within national jurisdiction, and the open ocean, high seas and areas beyond national jurisdiction); duration; lead organisation/responsible body and reporting (e.g. public administration, including *inter alia* international conventions/agreements, national ministries/agencies, sub-national ministry/agency; community based organisation; international non-governmental organisation; private sector including *inter alia* multinational corporation; national corporation; small-medium size enterprises); stakeholder participation and their links and types of reporting/compliance linked to marine plastic litter and microplastics); (e.g. industry, consumer); target audience; and investment (e.g. funds, source and time horizon). Respondents will be asked to complete a series of listings on the focus of the action/activity. For example, does the action/activity cover specific polluting items (bottles, containers, fishing gear, cigarettes, microbeads), specific pollution leakage and movement pathways (e.g. freshwater systems, soils, airborne, coastal and ocean currents, water column deposition and marine sediments), sources and whether it takes a systems view or is sector-specific; where does the action occur along the lifecycle (e.g. production, consumption and waste management); pollution impacts and the specific pollutants; whether the action takes a source to seas view; the type of action (e.g. normative (regulatory, part of regional and international agreement), evidential (monitoring and assessment), capacity building (education, campaigns, citizen/community science)); is it a voluntary action/activity or part of a regulatory framework; and what are the arrangements for data collection, storage and sharing (e.g. open, restricted, proprietary, cloud-based, web service).

8. The intensity and sustainability of the actions and activities will be assessed through characterisation of the drivers (international, regional and national public policy in different arenas, public awareness) and the levels and extent of funding and support. The intent is to identify where are the major efforts, their focus, and gaps. Respondents will also be asked to upload relevant documents, outline experiences, difficulties and successes, and identify potential impact. Follow-up interviews may be requested with respondents for clarification or additional information.

9. A team of academic researchers familiar with the different topics, and aware of key regional and national considerations as well as languages, will quality-assure the survey inputs, undertake interviews as required and oversee the uploading of data into an online inventory platform where the results will be shared through an open-access interface. This will enable users to gain access to source documents and review and undertake their own geographic and activity-based analyses, such as baseline surveys and overall effectiveness of different actions. An initial suite of statistics will also be provided. The inventory of actions/activities will eventually feed into UNEP's World Environment Situation Room (currently under development) where the results of the stocktaking will be presented through a visual dashboard of key metadata, such as focus from source-to-sea, type of lead organisation, and lifecycle phase (see Table 1 below).

Lifecycle phase	Criteria to address	Explanatory text
Sustainable Production	Ecodesign	For durability, reuse, prevention of microplastics through abrasion & end-of-life treatment
	Microplastics	Primary, secondary
	Additives and associated chemicals	Also including legacy chemicals
Sustainable Consumption ( <i>across the supply chain</i> )	Reduction	Taxes on products
	Elimination	Product bans
	Waste prevention	Guidelines and policies - household, public venues, commercial, industry sectors, government
Waste Management	Environmentally sound treatment of wastes	Waste hierarchy, separation/sorting, collection, storage, disposal, responsible trade
	Mitigation and environmentally sound removal	Including microplastics (e.g. wastewater, sewage sludge), fishing nets
	Economic instruments to support waste management	Principles of different environment funds, pay-as-you-throw, deposit schemes
	Hazard and disaster debris prevention and management	Preparation and response

*Table 1: Detailed description of 'Lifecycle Phase' as an example of a key metadata category that could be used to break down and visually represent the results of the stocktaking exercise.*

10. The survey data and situational analysis in the stocktaking report will also be used as input for other reports being prepared for the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group, such as the work requested in operative subparagraph 7(d) and described in Working Document UNEP/AHEG/2019/3/5. To this end, all actions and activities will thus be classified into three major categories: normative, evidential and capacity building:

(a) Normative: Respondents will be asked to list the legislative, regulatory, policy and institutional frameworks, economic incentives for marine litter and microplastics including existing instruments, procedures and institutional structures. Questions will focus on inter-ministerial committees, regional strategies and agreements, trans-national, national and sub-national agreements, policies and plans, and inter-governmental and private sector partnerships. Information on institutional responsibilities will also be included and linked to the relevant

legislative and operational mandates, as well as to the relevant legislative, regulatory, policy and institutional frameworks. Respondents will be asked to identify gaps, barriers (social, economic or environmental) and/or conflicts in the legal coverage for marine litter and microplastics. The latter may include existing legislation which is sector-specific and not intended to address marine litter and microplastics in a holistic and systematic way. Respondents will be asked to identify any accompanying regulations and/or guidelines that directly govern the administration of these laws, or if there is a level of autonomy to sub-national administrative bodies which can constrain the effective and uniform implementation of key pieces of legislation nationally;

(b) Evidential: Respondents will be asked to outline monitoring and assessment activities including information on ongoing and future commitments for marine plastic litter and microplastics including vision, feasibility and potential structure and funding in place/needed. Information in this section will focus on identifying the frameworks under which the monitoring is taking place (e.g. GESAMP, Regional Seas) looking at *inter alia* plastics and microplastics in freshwater systems; airborne; marine plastic litter washed/deposited on beaches or shorelines (beach litter); marine plastic litter in the water column; marine plastic litter on the seafloor/seabed; marine plastic litter ingestion and entanglement; and specific activities on microplastics. Respondents will be asked to identify ongoing assessments and analytical activities including ongoing and future planned commitments of reviews, analyses and tracking of progress on targets and strategies relating to marine litter, microplastics and associated use and management of plastics, especially with respect to activities linked to reporting on Sustainable Development Goal 14.1.1 and 14.1.2 Data arrangements for sharing data, access to progress reporting and publication of results will also be documented;

(c) Capacity Building: Respondents will be asked to provide details on different aspects of the action/activity. For example, the basis of an awareness programme (e.g. impact knowledge, desired behaviour change through different frameworks such as deposit return schemes); sectoral guidelines; as well as workshops, conferences, and bilateral training programmes. Respondents will be asked to evaluate the engagement of communities and outline broad educational commitments. Activities relating to stakeholder development of policy and institutional frameworks will be tagged specifically and cross-referenced to the relevant normative activities. For the educational aspects, age range and institutional context will be identified (e.g. schools and universities and life-learning settings). Citizen science and community actions, especially those connected to national/ international monitoring, will be cross-referenced to the relevant evidential activities.

11. The submissions will be initially evaluated by region, category of activity from source-to-sea and across the life cycle of plastics. A dashboard will be developed in consultation with members of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics during its third meeting in Bangkok.
12. A preliminary analysis of the first set of submissions will be made available for feedback to the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics during its third meeting in Bangkok. This analysis uses a Fuzzy Logic\* approach, in which each aspect of the action/activity is classified (e.g. for geographic range: small/medium/large; for duration: short/medium/long; for engagement at all levels: low/medium/high; for funding: low/medium/high etc.). By combining the classes with rules that link the scale of inputs with likely outputs, an overview of the intensity of the different types of activities and actions across the four cross-cutting themes (i.e. lifecycle phases of plastics; environmental zones; geographic range and reporting/compliance) can be generated.
13. The effectiveness of current and potential response options and activities across the four themes will be analysed (in coordination with the work under subparagraph 7(d) and described in Working Document UNEP/AHEG/2019/3/5) within the three major categories of activity and action.

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\* A comprehensive definition of Fuzzy Logic can be found in UNEA-4 Official Working Document 11 (UNEP/EA.4/11: Analysis of voluntary commitments targeting marine litter and microplastics pursuant to resolution 3/7: Report of the Executive Director) in Annex I, Section I, Part B (pages 6-9).

Examples include:

- a) Normative:
  - i. Inter-ministerial committees, inter-governmental and private sector partnerships;
  - ii. Policy instruments specific to waste prevention and management and marine litter specifically
- b) Evidential:
  - i. Monitoring standards and programmes;
  - ii. Reporting and compliance, including standards;
  - iii. Funds committed;
  - iv. Economic incentives and other stakeholder engagement programmes;
- c) Capacity Building:
  - i. Awareness programmes focusing on 1) impact knowledge, 2) desired behaviour change or 3) regulatory frameworks (including for e.g. deposit return schemes);
  - ii. Sectoral guidelines;
  - iii. Workshops and conferences;
  - iv. Bilateral programmes.

## Questions

14. The Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics may wish to comment on the approach proposed to guide the secretariat in carrying out the mandate of subparagraph 7(a). In particular:
- i. Do participants wish to include further categories of activities?
  - ii. Do participants wish to examine additional cross-cutting themes?
  - iii. Which indicators do participants consider the most useful for the stocktaking dashboard?