

BRIEFING NOTE ON THE WORK UNDER THE MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON PLASTICS POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PLASTICS TRADE

This note is aimed at providing a brief factual presentation of discussions under the Ministerial Statement on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade adopted on December 2021.¹ It provides relevant information on the work undertaken by delegations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) co-sponsoring² the Statement.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The WTO Informal Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (IDP) was established by a group of WTO Members during the Committee on Trade and Environment (CTE) 2020 "Trade and Environment Week".³ The dialogue – currently comprising 71 WTO Members representing around 75% of plastics trade – was born out of the recognition of the need for coordinated action to address the rising environmental, health, and economic costs of plastics pollution – amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic – and the importance of the trade dimension as a solution.⁴ Co-sponsors noted the challenge of plastics pollution was of increasing concern to all delegations, large and small, developed and developing. The dialogue – which is open to all WTO Members – seeks to identify opportunities for enhanced trade cooperation within the rules and mechanisms of the WTO to contribute to domestic, regional and global efforts to reduce plastics pollution and to support efforts in other fora.

1.2. During its first year of work, dialogue participants were able to identify and highlight the close relationship between trade and trade policies with the actions required to address plastics pollution and affect meaningful change. They heard from key stakeholders on trade-related research and on global, regional and domestic efforts to address plastics pollution.⁵ Participants explored how the WTO could contribute to strengthening policy coherence, exploring collective approaches among WTO members and improving technical assistance to developing members. They noted the importance of having a comprehensive mapping of the full plastics value chain and life cycle, and to analyse the opportunities and challenges it presents, in particular considering trade in plastics accounts for about 5 % of global trade – or more than 1 trillion US dollars in 2019 – almost 40% higher than previously estimated.

1.3. Many participants shared studies and experiences on topics such as marine litter, actions to restrict single-use plastic products, cross-border waste management and public-

¹ More information can be found at: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/ppesp_e/ppesp_e.htm.

² Current co-sponsors are: Albania; Angola; Australia; Austria; Barbados; Belgium; Bolivia, Plurinational State of; Bulgaria; Cabo Verde; Cambodia; Cameroon; Canada; Central African Republic; Chad; Chile; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Ecuador; Estonia; European Union; Fiji; Finland; France; Gambia; Germany; Greece; Honduras; Hong Kong, China; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Jamaica; Japan; Kazakhstan; Korea, Republic of; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macao, China; Maldives; Malta; Morocco; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Panama; Peru; Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of; Singapore; Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; Suriname; Sweden; Switzerland; Thailand; Tonga; United Kingdom; Uruguay; Vanuatu.

³ The "Trade and Environment Week" is a set of side-events organized by WTO Members back-to-back with the formal meeting of the CTE. See https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e/tedweek2020_e.htm.

⁴ See co-sponsors initial communication WT/CTE/W/250/Rev.2.

⁵ Stakeholders included, *inter alia*, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Customs Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Pacific Islands Forum, the International Organisation for Standardization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Economic Forum, the International Chamber of Commerce, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Forum on Trade, Environment and SDGs at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Pew Charitable Trusts, the Quaker United Nations Office and the Center for International Environmental Law.

private partnerships in the transition to a circular economy for plastics. They also stressed the need to avoid duplication of efforts and ensuring mutual supportiveness and complementarity with other domestic, regional and international efforts to address plastics pollution, including those under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention) and its Plastic Waste Amendments, and in the context of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Proponents repeatedly stressed the critical importance of strengthening technical assistance for developing members, in particular the least-developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS), in their efforts across the life cycle of plastics to address marine litter and microplastics, including through a circular economy approach.

1.4. These discussions have been summarized in the group's 2021 Factual Report ([INF/TE/IDP/W/3](#)) and informed the work of participating members towards issuing a Ministerial Statement in December 2021.

2 MINISTERIAL STATEMENT AND ONGOING WORK

2.1. Trade ministers of the 71 co-sponsors adopted a Ministerial Statement dated 10 December 2021 ([WT/MIN\(21\)/8/Rev.2](#)) expressing their shared understandings on the topic and charting their work towards concrete, pragmatic, and effective outcomes by the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference. The Statement lays out some key areas in which the Dialogue will focus going forward, including *inter alia*: sharing experiences and identifying actions needed to improve gathering of trade flows and supply chains; improving transparency regarding trade policies; strengthening regulatory cooperation with other international bodies – in particular the UNEA negotiations, WCO HS plastics classification reform and efforts under the BRS Conventions; identifying environmentally sustainable trade policies and mechanisms; and strengthening trade-related technical assistance for vulnerable economies, including LDCs and SIDS.

2.2. Three workstreams have been created to move technical work forward, namely on: i) Crosscutting issues such as technical assistance and capacity building, transparency and collective approaches; ii) Promoting Trade to Tackle Plastic Pollution including environmentally sustainable waste management technologies, environmentally sustainable and effective substitutes and alternatives *etc.*; and iii) Reduction to Tackle Plastic Pollution and Circular Economy for Plastics, including reducing unnecessary or harmful plastics and plastic products such as single use plastics.

2.3. The 71 WTO Members co-sponsors of the Ministerial Statement have been consistent on the importance of their work at the WTO to support and not duplicate work in other international and regional processes, in particular under UNEA. Meetings will continue to be open and transparent for interested WTO Members, who are encouraged to join, and co-sponsors continue to value proactive engagement by a broad diversity of Members and relevant stakeholders, including, *inter alia*, international organizations and institutions, trade and environmental authorities and domestic bodies, the private sector, academia, and civil society, as noted in the Ministerial Statement.
