

GROUP OF EXPERTS FOR MARINE LITTER AND MICROPLASTICS

BACKGROUND

The benefits of plastic are undeniable. The material is cheap, lightweight and easy to make. These qualities have led to a boom in the production of plastic over the past century. This trend will continue as global plastic production skyrockets over the next 10 to 15 years. We are already unable to cope with the amount of plastic waste we generate. Only a tiny fraction is recycled. About 13 million tonnes of plastic leak into our oceans every year, harming biodiversity, economies and, potentially, our own health. The world urgently needs to rethink the way we manufacture, use and manage plastic.

Marine litter is today recognized as a global challenge. This problem is affecting not only countries with inadequate waste management systems but, due to waste deposited by ocean currents, even those with good waste management systems are struggling to cope. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses marine debris and pollution through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 (target 14.1), with a particular focus on sources from land-based activities. Similarly, goals 6, 11 and 12 target untreated wastewater (6.3), municipal and other waste management (11.6), environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout their life cycle (12.4), and overall waste reduction (12.5). According to [the Ellen McArthur Foundation](#), by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish by weight in our oceans if the business-as-usual-model continues. The latest United Nations Environment Assembly held in 2018 addressed this alarming scenario in its Resolution on Marine Litter and Microplastics.

The members of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) have through UNEA 1, 2 and more unequivocally UNEA 3 Resolution on Marine Litter *stressed* the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics; *urged* all actors to step up actions to “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution” and *encouraged* all Member States to, based on best available knowledge on sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, prioritize policies and measures at appropriate scale, to avoid marine litter and microplastics entering the marine environment.

The major coastal cities and towns found in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region generate significant amounts of solid waste, some of which reaches the sea to contribute to the marine litter problem. This is exacerbated through the transporting of solid waste/debris via river discharges from urban areas located further inland in their watersheds. Marine plastic debris and microplastics cause a severe threat to marine life by ingestion and entanglement, and possibly threaten human health. At least five major cities on the mainland coast of Eastern Africa; namely Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Beira, Maputo and Durban, are located on the coast.

Despite marine litter being recognized as a global challenge, its impacts are felt locally, and these impacts vary across populations and ecosystems. Furthermore, the region is experiencing a multitude of national and regional initiatives dealing with different aspects that are related in one way or another to marine litter and microplastics but with little coordination, communication and shared learning between partners working within this space. It is therefore essential that informal and formal mechanisms are initiated to facilitate communication between practitioners and experts and among different initiatives as well as funding agencies. Such communication will assist in minimizing duplication of efforts, building partnerships, improving coordination, and providing a forum/mechanism for sharing of information and knowledge among experts, managers and funding agencies as well as joint planning and implementation.

Recognizing the need to start addressing these challenges, the Ninth Conference of Parties to the Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment for the WIO region (Nairobi Convention) held in Mombasa, Kenya in August 2018, *requested* the Secretariat, in collaboration and cooperation with partners, to establish a marine litter regional technical working group in the Western Indian Ocean region.

Several other related decisions were adopted under ‘Decision CP.9/3. Management of marine litter and municipal wastewater in the Western Indian Ocean’ including on the development of a regional strategy or action plan or both on the management of marine litter and microplastic and capacity-building programmes on marine litter and microplastics, including microbeads, for a harmonized approach to data generation, monitoring and reporting; conducting outreach and public awareness activities on the impact of municipal waste and marine litter on marine species and their habitats; and encouraging countries to discourage plastic microbeads, take measures within their national capacities to consider phasing out their use in the region and promote the exchange of expertise, best practice and lessons learned.

In response to the ‘Decision CP.9/3. Management of marine litter and municipal wastewater in the Western Indian Ocean’, especially in respect to establishing a marine litter regional technical working group WIOMSA and the Nairobi Convention Secretariat in collaboration with other partners working on marine litter and microplastics, is setting up a Group of Experts on Marine Litters and Microplastics.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The broad goal of the Group of Experts on Marine Litter and Microplastics is provide a forum for sharing and exchange of information; providing policy guidance and advice to the Nairobi Convention and other regional frameworks; and synthesizing information on the topic from different sources and produce peer-reviewed publications and other products. The Group’s work is planned to be completed in three years or less.

The specific responsibilities will be as follows:

- Assess the current status of marine litter and microplastics knowledge in the WIO region by reviewing the literature to assess the policy landscape on marine litter in different countries, institutional frameworks, dominant research foci, their relative coverage, and identify any major gaps and/or limitations. Publish this review as a regional Status Report on Marine Litter and in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Linking to the recently developed Regional Marine Litter Action Plan, facilitate the development of a coherent regional vision and strategy for work on marine litter and microplastics within the context of the Nairobi Convention;
- Facilitate the building of a constituency for work on marine litter and microplastics among formal and informal stakeholders, including governments, management authorities, private sector, communities and encourage dialogue between them;
- Support the development and implementation of regional marine litter and microplastics monitoring programme and studies on bio-accumulation of microplastic related toxicity in the food chain;
- Facilitate and support the identification of capacity building needs, and the implementation of training activities related to marine litter and microplastics for different categories of stakeholders;
- Facilitate and support the development of relevant environmental education and awareness raising programmes related to marine litter and microplastics management;
- Provide and facilitate access to technical advice and information across all levels of work on marine litter and microplastics, including the adoption of appropriate marine litter and microplastics management technologies and their reduction measures;
- Develop regional Guidelines, Best Practices and Procedures for marine litter and microplastics management;
- Provide advice on the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework at all appropriate levels of the management of marine litter and microplastics.
- Provide state-of-the-art science to support policy developments on marine litter and microplastics in the region through the Science to Policy Platform of the Convention and other appropriate for a;
- Offer technical support in the development and review of concepts/proposals in relation to marine litter and microplastics on behalf of Nairobi Convention and WIOMSA in respect to the implementation of the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan;
- Undertake quality assurance of outputs related to marine litter and microplastics produced through the support of both Nairobi Convention and WIOMSA.

HOW THE GROUP WORKS

The Group of Experts for Marine Litter and Microplastics is established by the Nairobi Convention vide ‘Decision CP.9/3. Management of marine litter and municipal wastewater in the Western Indian Ocean’ and will be hosted by WIOMSA. The core membership of the Group will comprise of prominent experts whose selection is based on the strong regional knowledge and experience in marine litter and microplastics as well as a firm commitment to the Group’s activities. In its meetings as well as in the implementation of its activities, the Group will invite, consult and involve on the basis of issues representatives of partner organizations and individual experts as well.

The selected Group members will elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chair from amongst themselves at their first meeting. The Vice-Chair shall act as Chairperson of meetings in the absence of the Chairperson.

Since the Group will be operating under the Nairobi Convention, it will be reporting directly to the Focal Points of the Nairobi Convention as well as the relevant Regional Task Forces established under the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded programme ‘Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the protection of the Western Indian Ocean from land-based sources and activities’ (WIOSAP).

PRIORITY OPERATIONAL THEMES

The Group will provide a coordinated and cooperative approach involving key partners in the region as well as individual experts to facilitate the implementation of the priority activities under following themes:

- **Research.** The Group as a technical group will conduct a review of the existing gaps in knowledge with the aim of setting up a research agenda that responds to the information needs of marine litter and microplastics in the region.
- **Capacity building for improved management of marine litter and microplastics.** Capacity building in marine litter and microplastics management is needed since there is unequal distribution of expertise in management of these problems throughout the region. The Group input will be essential in facilitating the designing and delivery of different types of capacity building programmes.
- **Influencing policy and decision-making processes.** The Group aims at bridging the gaps between science and policy processes, through providing well synthesized information in a form of brochures, manuals, toolkits and other media, to decision-makers, managers, practitioners and general public.

- **Contributing to the regional and global discussions.** On request, the Group will also provide advice to the countries and regional bodies participating in regional global discussions on marine litters and microplastics.