

Plastics and Waste

Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues

[Update on plastics and the environment](#) ↗

[About the Plastics and Waste Session](#) ↗

FACING THE PLASTIC CRISIS

An estimated 8.3 billion tonnes of plastics have been produced since the 1950s, of which 79% has ended in landfills or in the natural environment. Meanwhile, only 9% has been recycled as plastic is currently designed for single use rather than recycling [1]. Plastic pollution is wreaking **havoc on marine and terrestrial ecosystems**. While we produce 275 million tons of plastic waste annually, up to 12 million tons lead into the oceans [2]. If current trends continue, our oceans could contain more plastic than fish by 2050 [3].

Addressing the plastic crisis is a crucial global challenge for the upcoming years, which requires an **international coordinated response**. This summary highlights current efforts and achievements, as well as paths forward to reduce or eliminate plastic waste.

CURRENT EFFORTS

The **Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments**, adopted in 2019, became effective in January 2021 and now regulate transboundary transfers of plastic waste. They are expected to promote recycling, Environmentally Sound Management (ESM) and Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), while preventing dumping [4]. Since 2019, the **Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership** has been fostering collaboration and work on policy frameworks [5].

The Ad Hoc Open-Ended **Expert Group** (AHEG) on marine litter and microplastics

established by UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) in 2017 concluded its work this year with a summary highlighting response options [6]. Since 2012, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has also been continuously working on the **Global Partnership on Marine Litter** [7]. Recent developments include Action Tracks and a digital multi-stakeholder platform. Some member states have engaged in actions at the **national level** to promote ESM and circular economy.

NEXT STEPS

The need to strengthen the global response to the plastic crisis is pressing. Fostering robust international cooperation regimes that address the impacts of plastics throughout its life cycle is a priority. Recommended actions are:

- ▶ Reinforce, adapt and coordinate **existing instruments** to reach their full potential, including existing partnerships
- ▶ Start negotiations on a **global agreement**, a response option which gathered support from a majority of Member States participating in the AHEG
- ▶ Harmonize and optimize **standards and guidelines** on plastic production, ESM and recycling
- ▶ Support **science** in all fields to develop comprehensive solutions to the plastics crisis (trade, standards, human rights, climate, air pollution)
- ▶ Coordinate **national measures** to foster circular economy and ESM
- ▶ Foster capacity building and **technology transfers**.