

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday 23 January 2020
9:00 am – 12:00 pm, 1:30 – 4:30 pm
United Nations Office of Nairobi
Conference Room 4

Background Document for Agenda Item 6: Outcomes of the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics

This note serves as a background document for consideration under Agenda Item 6: outcomes of the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics. It provides an update on the outcomes of the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, which took place 18 - 22 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, and provides information on the preparations of the next two meetings of the expert group.

Member States are invited to consider the outcome of the third meeting of the expert group and to provide any feedback on the preparations for the upcoming meetings, including with regard to dates and venues.

Briefing note: Third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics

The purpose of this note is to provide an update on the outcome of the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics held from 18 to 22 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. All meeting documents, including the outcome document, and other relevant information are available [here](#).

1. Background

Pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 4/6 adopted by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) at its fourth session, which extended the mandate of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics established by UNEA resolution 3/7, the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics took place from 18 to 22 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. A preparatory consultation meeting among accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders was held prior to the meeting, on Sunday, 17 November 2019.

Through resolution 4/6, UNEA requested the expert group, building on its previous work, to:

- (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;
- (b) Identify technical and financial resources or mechanisms for supporting countries in addressing marine plastic litter and microplastics;
- (c) Encourage partnerships that undertake activities such as the development of source inventories, the improvement of waste management, awareness-raising and the promotion of innovation in relation to the prevention of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;
- (d) Analyse the effectiveness of existing and potential response options and activities with regard to marine litter and microplastics at all levels to determine the contribution that they make to solving the global problem.

2. Summary of the outcomes of the meeting

2.1 Attendance

More than 200 participants attended the meeting, representing 85 member States of the United Nations and members of the UN specialized agencies, UN bodies, multilateral environmental agreement secretariats, and major groups and stakeholders. Extra-budgetary resources generously provided by the Governments of Norway and Sweden facilitated the convening of this meeting.

2.2 Election of officers – bureau

According to the UNEA Rules of Procedure, a subsidiary organ of UNEA shall elect its own officers (Rule 63, paragraph 3). Accordingly, the expert group elected five officers representing all five UN regions. The members of the Bureau with representatives were elected by acclamation at the opening session of the meeting, as follows:

- Chair: H.E. Ms. Jillian Dempster, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of New Zealand
- Vice-Chair: H.E. Ms. Rose Makena Muchiri Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya (represented by Ms. Maxine Khakasa at this meeting)
- Vice-Chair: Mr. Satoru Iino, Deputy Director, Office of the Marine Environment, Ministry of Environment, Japan
- Vice-Chair: Prof. Ruslan Butovsky, Expert, Russian Federation

- Rapporteur: Ms. Karen Watson, Senior Environmental Officer of the Environmental Protection Agency, Guyana

2.2 Rules of procedure

As a subsidiary organ of the UN Environment Assembly, the expert group applied the rules of procedure of UNEA, as appropriate (Rule 64).

2.3 Organization of the meeting

The meeting was conducted mainly in plenary session but also in four informal breakout groups, following the modality adopted at the second meeting of the expert group, to encourage in-depth discussions and enhanced interaction among the experts. Each breakout group was cofacilitated by a member State representative and a representative from among the Major Groups and Stakeholders. The cofacilitators reported back to the plenary for formal discussion of the key issues. The organization of breakout groups co-facilitated by representatives of both member States and of major groups and stakeholders was agreed by the meeting participants on the basis of a proposal from the Chair and on the understanding that the break-out sessions would be informal in nature.

2.4 A brief overview of the substantive discussions

During the meeting, many experts called for **increased engagement** of regional and sub-regional entities and consideration of such initiatives and frameworks, in particular the Regional Seas Conventions and action plans. Moreover, there was a considerable interest in the work of the Scientific Advisory Committee for the assessment of sources, pathways and hazards of litter, including plastic litter and microplastic pollution.

Many experts also demonstrated a strong interest to **accelerate progress under the expert group leading up to UNEA 5** and to clearly clarify the timelines, sequence of activities, and expected outcomes, in preparation for the fourth and fifth meetings of the expert group.

With regard to **stocktaking** (paragraph 7a of UNEA resolution 4/6), the expert group requested the Secretariat to consider relevant work undertaken by UNEP, as well as other relevant existing bodies of work, invite voluntary contributions to the stocktaking exercise, capture a wide range of activities, and provide guidance for the submission process.

On **financial and technical resources and mechanisms** (paragraph 7b of UNEA resolution 4/6), the expert group requested the Secretariat to produce a report for the 4th meeting that will consider relevant existing bodies of work, collect information from existing sources, look at funding resources and mechanisms, promote a better understanding of the current state of play of technical and financial resources and mechanisms, examine new opportunities through innovative financing, and gather information on existing technical resources, environmentally sound substitutes and mechanisms, addressing aspects of the whole life cycle of marine litter and microplastics.

On **partnerships** (paragraph 7c of UNEA resolution 4/6), the Secretariat was requested to continue to consider partnerships as a cross-cutting issue and present case studies and examples from relevant partnerships.

With regard to **effectiveness** (paragraph 7d of UNEA resolution 4/6), the expert group requested the Secretariat to ensure that the stocktaking survey will feed into the effectiveness analysis, take into account comments provided during the third meeting of the expert group, consider the existing body of work on effectiveness analysis methodologies, consult member States intersessionally on a revised methodology, carry out pilot studies, and invite the scientific advisory committee to provide advice on methodological approaches related to effectiveness.

The outcomes are outlined in more detail in the outcome document which was adopted by the expert group on the final day of the meeting.

The outcome document complements the official meeting report which reflects the proceedings of the meeting. An advance version of the official meeting report was shared in January 2020 with member States and with the Rapporteur of the meeting for final clearance, in accordance with established UN practice.

On this basis, the meeting reached broad understanding on the main items to be discussed at its next meeting and recognized the need for further consideration of issues raised at previous meetings.

3. Preparation for the fourth and fifth meetings of the ad hoc open-ended expert group

3.1 Dates and venues

The expert group considered that the fourth meeting should preferably take place in May 2020 and that the fifth meeting should preferably take place in November 2020, and that future meetings will take place in Nairobi, unless formal offers to host a future meeting from member States are received by the Secretariat by 31 December 2019. The expert group entrusted its bureau to decide, in close consultation with member States, on the dates and venues of its future meetings, by 31 January 2020 at the latest.

During the meeting, Rwanda (by letter to the Executive Director dated 19 November 2019 and by oral statement during the meeting), offered to host one of the upcoming meetings of the expert group, and Peru (by oral statement during the meeting and confirmed by a formal Note Verbale letter to the Executive Director dated 30 December 2019) offered to host the fourth meeting of the expert group.

Both offers were supported by representatives from their respective regional groups (the African Group and the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) through statements made on the final day of the meeting of the expert group.

The options regarding the venue for the two remaining meetings of the expert group (AHEG 4 and AHEG 5) can be summarized as follows:

- AHEG 4 and 5 are both organized in Nairobi, Kenya;
- AHEG 4 is organized in Lima, Peru, and AHEG 5 in Nairobi, Kenya;
- AHEG 4 is organized in Kigali, Rwanda and AHEG 5 in Nairobi, Kenya;
- AHEG 4 is organized in Lima, Peru, and AHEG 5 in Kigali, Rwanda.

3.2 Cost considerations

While specific information on costs is not yet available, pending more detailed formal offers from member States, it can be noted that:

- All meetings of the expert group are financed through extrabudgetary resources, with limited or no impact on UNEP's core funding or Programme of Work;
- Financial support for travel to delegates from eligible member States and Major Groups and Stakeholders vary, but are generally estimated to be similar regardless where the meetings are held;
- Travel and per diem costs for Secretariat staff are expected to be slightly higher for meetings held outside Nairobi, but additional costs are not considered to be significant. Additional

support from staff with expertise in intergovernmental processes would be drawn from relevant Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and Regional Offices located in the regions.

3.3 Documentation

The third expert meeting requested early access to meeting documents for upcoming meetings, and the Secretariat will endeavour to make all documents available in English at the latest by 6 weeks before the meeting, and that working documents will be made available in all official UN languages as soon as possible before the meeting.

3.4 Inputs from Member States and stakeholders

As follow-up to the expert group, in December 2019, member States and Stakeholders were invited to provide inputs in writing for any or all of the below listed work streams, through the following website: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/reporting-tool>

- Voluntary inputs on examples of approaches to analyze effectiveness (subparagraph 7 (d) in UNEA resolution 4/6) – Submission deadline: 10 January 2020;
- Voluntary inputs to the report on stocktaking (subparagraph 7 (a) in UNEA resolution 4/6) - Submission deadline: 1 February 2020;
- Updates of relevant previous submissions to the first and second meeting of the expert group, pursuant to subparagraph 10 of UNEA resolution 3/7 – Submission deadline: preferably by 1 February 2020;
- Submission of potential response options, pursuant to paragraph 10 (d) of UNEA resolution 3/7 – Submission deadline: 1 February 2020.

The deadlines were set with the objective to allow the Secretariat to meet the deadlines for submission of working documents for the 4th meeting of the expert group. At the time of finalisation of this note, and at the request of some member States, an extension of the deadlines to submit inputs to the Secretariat is under consideration.

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Contact Persons for Feedback and Follow-up

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