

Statement by Our Sea of East Asia Network at INC-5.2: Toward a Treaty that Ends Plastic Pollution in the Ocean

We thank the Chair and Co-Facilitators for their continued efforts. As a marine environment research institute and civil society organization with over 16 years of experience addressing marine litter, we underscore the critical need for a treaty that delivers real impact, especially for the ocean, which has borne the brunt of unchecked plastic pollution.

Plastic pollution is not simply a downstream issue. It is a transboundary threat that requires bold, upstream intervention through global cooperation. The ocean has become a dumping ground for legacy plastic waste, ghost gear, microplastics, and other persistent plastic pollutants, threatening biodiversity, food security, and the rights of coastal communities. The future treaty must reflect this urgency.

1. Marine Environment as a Priority

The treaty must place the protection of the marine environment at its core. Plastic pollution in marine ecosystems—especially from abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing and aquaculture gear (ALDFG)—is one of the most harmful, persistent, and least regulated sources of plastic pollution. Estimates suggest that, on a global scale, ALDFG contributes at least 10% of marine plastic pollution¹.

ALDFG continues to accumulate in coastal and deep-sea ecosystems, threatening biodiversity, entangling marine species, degrading habitats, posing hazards to ship navigation, and compromising food security and livelihoods. The scale and transboundary nature of this problem require coordinated international action through binding measures—not fragmented, voluntary programs.

In order to be effective and to close existing governance gaps, provisions on plastic fishing and aquaculture gear must be mandatory, sector-specific, and applicable across the full lifecycle, from design and deployment to recovery and end-of-life management. We firmly urge the inclusion of legally binding provisions across the full lifecycle of plastic fishing and aquaculture gear within Articles 7 and 8, including:

- Design requirements for durability, traceability (e.g. gear marking), and environmental safety;
- Obligations for responsible deployment, retrieval, and recovery;
- Global standards for extended producer responsibility (EPR) and end-of-life management;
- Mandatory reporting and data collection on gear loss and recovery rates, alongside preventive measures to address root causes such as IUU fishing, gear conflict, and vandalism

¹ Ocean Conservancy & Global Ghost Gear Initiative (2022), Tackling Ghost Gear: Charting a Course to Solutions.

Monitoring systems based on science and data must also be established to regularly assess the scale, sources, and impacts of fishing and aquaculture gear pollution. Such systems are essential for evidence-based decision making and timely corrective action.

The treaty should also build coherence with existing international frameworks—including the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear, the Basel Convention, the London Convention and Protocol, and relevant IMO instruments—to close governance gaps and avoid regulatory loopholes.

In doing so, the treaty must also safeguard the rights and participation of small-scale fishers, coastal communities, and aquaculture workers, who are disproportionately affected by marine plastic pollution but often lack access to technical or financial support. A just transition must be ensured, including capacity building, access to funding, and the transfer of best available techniques and environmental practices to support the shift toward environmentally sound and effective alternatives to harmful plastic-based gear.

Only with binding, systemic measures targeting this critical source of marine litter can the treaty credibly claim to protect the ocean.

2. Cut the Tap: Binding Global Measures to Reduce Plastic Production

A treaty based on voluntary, nationally determined contributions (NDCs) will not deliver the scale of systemic change required. Plastic pollution must be addressed at its root.

We strongly call for binding, top-down global measures that mandate:

- Capping and reducing virgin plastic production, with quantifiable, time-bound targets aligned with climate, biodiversity, and pollution objectives;
- Phasing out high-risk and unnecessary plastic polymers and chemical additives;
- Establishing global design standards to ensure product reusability, repairability, and non-toxicity;
- Prohibiting misleading end-of-pipe solutions—such as incineration, chemical recycling, and greenwashing practices that distract from systemic reduction efforts—from being framed as meaningful mitigation measures.

Without strong global controls on production, downstream efforts—no matter how well intended—will be insufficient. Tackling plastic pollution through end-of-life management alone is akin to mopping the floor while the tap is running.

3. Financing Must Match the Problem

We urge negotiators to establish a dedicated and transparent financial mechanism that:

- Covers the full costs of implementing the treaty;
- Supports countries in addressing legacy pollution in marine environments;
- Compensates communities for the ongoing health and environmental damages caused by plastic pollution;

- Enables a just transition for informal workers and vulnerable coastal economies;
- Applies the polluter-pays principle, particularly toward fossil fuel and petrochemical industries.

Without predictable, accessible, and equitable funding, including for monitoring, clean-up, and public participation, the treaty will fall short of its mandate.

4. Equity, Transparency, and Inclusion

Communities most affected by plastic pollution must be recognized. This includes informal waste workers, small-scale fishers, coastal communities, and indigenous peoples, many of whom bear the heaviest burdens of waste colonialism and environmental injustice. The treaty must ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making and explicitly protect their right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, as recognized under international human rights law.

A rights-based approach must be central to the treaty, with specific provisions safeguarding the rights to health, information, participation, and access to remedy across the full plastics lifecycle.

Transparency and traceability are essential for accountability and environmental protection. The treaty must require public disclosure of chemical additives and polymer content, standardized global labeling and tracking systems, and access to data critical for monitoring marine pollution.

Finally, the treaty must include explicit safeguards against conflicts of interest, particularly from vested commercial actors, and must protect against corporate interference in shaping treaty content. Decision-making procedures should allow for progress even in the absence of full consensus: a strong treaty must not be held hostage by a small minority of low-ambition countries.

This is not the time for half-measures. We need a treaty that delivers binding global production caps, tackles harmful chemicals and polymers, prioritizes reuse over recycling, holds polluters accountable, and secures just and inclusive implementation. The ocean cannot wait for incremental progress or diluted compromise. A treaty fit to end plastic pollution must be bold, enforceable, and centered on the environment and the people it seeks to protect. Therefore, we call on all negotiators to act with courage and ambition.

As a vital carbon sink and climate regulator, the ocean is doubly burdened by plastic pollution and the climate stressors it worsens. Marine litter undermines habitat integrity, disrupts carbon cycling, and weakens ocean resilience. The treaty must acknowledge these linkages and open the door for future climate-relevant measures.

Now is the time to recognize that access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is not a privilege, but a right. The global community must deliver an instrument that meets the scale of the crisis, not in name only, but through enforceable global obligations and measurable outcomes. Let us deliver a treaty that protects the ocean—for the planet, for people, and for future generations.