

Draft written views in advance of the second informal in-person meeting of Heads of Delegation to the INC on Plastic Pollution. Bangkok, 27–30 September 2026

The Plastics Center at Northeastern University in the United States brings together interdisciplinary expertise across plastics science, engineering, design, law, governance, and policy. The Center aims to contribute evidence and insight on institutional design that can support an effective, implementable and durable international regime on plastic pollution.

In responding to the Chair’s Guiding Questions, the Center wishes to bring the following science-based and institutional considerations to the attention of delegations. ***The central recommendation is that the treaty establish clear common obligations and an architecture capable of strengthening ambition over time, while allowing technical criteria, methodologies and operational details to be updated through annexes and decisions of the Conference of the Parties.*** The emphasis is on possible areas of convergence, implementation architecture and mechanisms that can keep the future instrument responsive to evolving evidence over time.

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Overall, the future instrument should be designed as an adaptive regime capable of incorporating evolving scientific evidence without repeatedly reopening its core legal architecture.** Core mandates and obligations should be sufficiently clear in the instrument, while technical criteria, methodologies, lists and operational details can be updated through annexes and decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), as appropriate.
2. **The relationship between the treaty text, COP decisions and interim work should be explicit.** The instrument should establish the essential legal and institutional architecture; future COP decisions should operationalize technical procedures; and the diplomatic conference could mandate preparatory work during the interim period so that implementation can begin with agreed methodologies, baselines and institutional arrangements.
3. **How the treaty text allocates implementation work and the COP’s voting-threshold are a single design problem. Above all, a formal COP decision-making rule that includes a fallback voting threshold (if consensus is exhausted)—not just the adoption of its rules of procedures—must be anchored in the treaty text itself.** For ex, the BBNJ requires two-thirds majority for substantive matters while the chemicals conventions (Stockholm, Rotterdam, Minamata) use three-quarters as the fallback for amendments and annex listings. Absent this, the COP will find itself paralyzed no matter how much work is assigned to it in the treaty.
4. **The treaty’s structure should link national reporting to the other structural process articles like national plans, implementation and compliance, and any relevant core obligations or processes** (on chemical additives or product design for ex). The duty to report and its object should be locked in the treaty text itself, which should also provide minimum hooks for statistical/business-disclosure obligations and for NGO or third-party submissions of information (for any implementation body).
5. **Science should be policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive.** A dedicated, independent and transparent science-policy interface should assess evidence, identify knowledge gaps and uncertainties, develop technical criteria and communicate areas of scientific agreement and disagreement in forms that are directly usable by Parties.

CLUSTER A

- National Plans should translate the objectives of the instrument into coherent national implementation pathways while remaining comparable across Parties. A common minimum information framework could enable Parties to describe measures, priorities, implementation needs, indicators and progress while preserving flexibility to reflect national circumstances. National Plans should be reviewed and periodically strengthened so that reporting and effectiveness evaluation inform subsequent plans and enable progression over time.
- Reporting, information exchange, implementation and compliance, and effectiveness evaluation should operate as one connected learning cycle rather than as separate reporting exercises. Reporting should generate information relevant to implementation; information exchange should make that evidence usable; effectiveness evaluation should identify whether measures are producing intended outcomes; and findings should inform subsequent national planning, assistance and COP decisions. Compliance arrangements should be facilitative, transparent and linked to targeted capacity-building, finance and technical support, while providing procedures to address persistent non-compliance.
- Information exchange could be supported by an open and interoperable clearinghouse mechanism that shares data, methodologies, policy experience, available technologies and alternatives, technical-assistance opportunities and lessons from implementation, with support for Parties that have limited data capacity.
- Harmonized data, indicators and methodologies are necessary for credible effectiveness evaluation. The regime should progressively develop comparable approaches across the plastics life cycle, including common definitions, interoperable data systems, transparent methodologies and quality assurance procedures. Global comparability should be balanced with realistic data requirements and differentiated national capacities.
- Effectiveness evaluation should assess outcomes as well as implementation. Evaluation should consider environmental, human-health and relevant socioeconomic outcomes, identify implementation gaps and unintended consequences, and enable the COP to adjust measures as evidence develops.
- The science-policy interface should have a formal role in the review cycle. It could synthesize monitoring and reporting information, identify emerging scientific issues, assess the adequacy of indicators and methods, and advise the COP on where technical guidance or updates may be needed.

CLUSTER B

- Decisions on plastic products that may require global measures should be guided by transparent, evidence-informed and consistently applied criteria. Relevant considerations could include risk, including hazard and exposure; persistence; likelihood of release or leakage; end-of-life management, including recyclability and compostability; circularity constraints; availability and safety of alternatives; avoidability or essentiality of uses; feasibility of implementation; equity; and potential unintended environmental, health or socioeconomic consequences. Globally agreed criteria can provide consistency while allowing their application to reflect differences in geography, availability of alternatives and national circumstances.
- Scientific criteria should be applicable not only to products but, where relevant, to chemicals used in plastics and potential alternatives. The future regime should be capable of reviewing new evidence

and updating technical lists or annexes over time. Criteria for alternatives should help avoid regrettable substitution and burden shifting across life-cycle stages or between environmental and health outcomes.

- Existing and legacy plastic pollution should be addressed through risk-based identification, prioritization and remediation. Common guidance could support the identification of accumulation zones, characterize ecological and human exposure, prioritize interventions according to risk and feasibility, and evaluate whether remediation itself could cause additional harm. Local and Indigenous knowledge can complement monitoring, risk assessment, and intervention decisions where relevant.
- Cooperation on waste management should combine common performance objectives with nationally appropriate implementation pathways. International cooperation can support standards, data systems, technical assistance, infrastructure planning and knowledge exchange while recognizing differences in waste composition, geography, institutional capacity and development conditions.
- The evidence base used by the regime should remain capable of considering upstream drivers, including production, supply and chemical composition, even where these issues are not explicitly framed in individual Guiding Questions. This does not predetermine the policy response; it ensures that effectiveness evaluation and future scientific assessments can examine all variables materially affecting plastic pollution across the full life cycle.

CLUSTER C

- The financial mechanism should provide adequate, predictable and accessible support for the capacities required to implement and evaluate the instrument, not only physical infrastructure. International public finance should provide a foundation, particularly for developing countries, while domestic resources, producer responsibility and private finance should complement rather than replace public commitments. Eligible support should include monitoring systems, laboratory and analytical capacity, data infrastructure, inventories, exposure assessment, research, training and participation in international scientific processes, particularly where these capacities are currently limited.
- Private-sector participation can mobilize finance, technology and implementation capacity, including through the polluter-pays principle and extended producer responsibility, but should operate under clear transparency and integrity safeguards. The regime should distinguish public obligations from complementary private finance, disclose relevant financial interests, and avoid arrangements in which funding relationships compromise scientific assessment, priority-setting or compliance processes.
- Technology transfer and technical assistance should be needs-based, interoperable and oriented toward long-term capability. Cooperation should facilitate access not only to technologies but also to methods, technical know-how, maintenance capacity, data standards and skills needed to apply and assess them. Technology choices should be evaluated for potential trade-offs and unintended consequences.
- Scientific capacity is itself an implementation condition. All Parties should be able to generate, interpret and use evidence relevant to national implementation and to participate meaningfully in the treaty's scientific and technical processes.

CLUSTER D

- The instrument should be guided by principles and approaches that support evidence-based, preventive and adaptive implementation, including precaution where serious risks are plausible despite scientific uncertainty, One Health, transparency, equity and just transition, the polluter-pays principle, and periodic review in light of new evidence.
- Public information, education and research should form part of the implementation infrastructure of the treaty. The regime should promote accessible information, transparent data, standardized research methods where appropriate, scientific literacy and mechanisms for incorporating relevant Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge integrated with broader scientific evidence.
- Definitions should provide legal clarity without preventing the regime from responding to technological and scientific change. Core legal terms should be sufficiently clear in the instrument, while highly technical classifications may be better maintained through annexes, guidance or COP decisions that can be updated as knowledge develops.
- The Secretariat should support coherence across reporting, scientific assessment, capacity-building and COP decision-making without duplicating the functions of an independent scientific or technical body. Clear institutional interfaces will be important to avoid fragmented information flows and overlapping mandates.

DEDICATED CONSULTATIONS: DECISION-MAKING AND SUBSIDIARY BODY OR BODIES

- A dedicated scientific and technical body should have a clearly bounded mandate and an explicit relationship to the COP. Its functions could include assessing emerging evidence; developing and periodically reviewing scientific criteria and methodologies; evaluating data and knowledge gaps; supporting effectiveness evaluation; and advising on possible updates to annexes, technical guidance or implementation methods. It should coordinate with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution and relevant chemicals and waste conventions, drawing on their assessments and avoiding duplication while addressing plastics-specific implementation needs. Final policy decisions should remain with Parties.
- The body should be independent, multidisciplinary and geographically balanced, with transparent rules for appointment, disclosure and management of conflicts of interest. Members should serve in their expert capacity, and procedures should protect the integrity of assessment while enabling input from relevant knowledge holders and stakeholders.
- The treaty regime should establish a procedure for managing scientific disagreement and building convergence within subsidiary bodies. The purpose should not be to manufacture unanimity, but to prevent technical disagreement from becoming an indefinite procedural veto while ensuring that uncertainty and legitimate alternative interpretations remain visible to Parties. Consensus should be sought in good faith in COP decision-making, while the rules of procedure should provide an agreed decision-making mechanism when all reasonable efforts to reach consensus have been exhausted.
- A Scientific Deliberation and Convergence Procedure could follow four steps. (1) frame the question and agree the evidentiary criteria; (2) identify areas of agreement, uncertainty and disagreement; (3) use facilitated, iterative deliberation to seek convergence and clarify the reasons for residual disagreement; and (4) where full consensus is not possible, transmit the principal assessment together

with clearly documented alternative scientific views, confidence levels and the evidentiary basis for each. The COP would then retain responsibility for the policy decision.

- The procedure should separate scientific disagreement from policy preference. Subsidiary bodies should distinguish disputes about data, methods or causal inference from value judgments, distributional choices or political trade-offs. This separation can help Parties understand which disagreements can be reduced through further evidence and which require an explicitly political decision.
- Leadership and facilitation capacity should be treated as institutional requirements. Co-chairs and facilitators should combine relevant technical credibility with demonstrated ability to manage multidisciplinary deliberation, identify common ground and document unresolved issues fairly.

POSSIBLE LANDING-ZONE ARCHITECTURE FOR AID TO NEGOTIATIONS 2

- In the legally binding instrument: establish the mandate and core functions of the scientific and technical body or bodies; the obligation to base implementation and review on the best available evidence; principles of independence, transparency and conflict-of-interest management; coordination with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution and relevant conventions; the relationship between scientific advice and COP decision-making; and authority for periodic review and updating through agreed procedures.
- Through future COP decisions and rules of procedure: operationalize membership and nomination procedures, evidentiary standards, assessment methods, peer review, data protocols, procedures for consensus-seeking and the documentation of minority or alternative views, and detailed criteria for technical recommendations.
- During the interim period: develop draft terms of reference for subsidiary bodies; prepare initial monitoring and reporting methodologies and technical definitions; identify baseline data needs; develop candidate scientific criteria for products, chemicals used in plastics and potential alternatives; design an information-exchange clearinghouse; and develop the Scientific Deliberation and Convergence Procedure for consideration by the first COP.
- This allocation would allow the treaty to remain legally clear while avoiding unnecessary technical rigidity. It would also give the future COP the institutional capacity to respond to new evidence without reopening the core agreement, while ensuring that major policy choices continue to be taken by Parties.