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### **Report from the workshop on Primary Plastic Polymers (PPP)**

4 and 5 April, 2024, Paris, France

*The present report is the sole responsibility of the organizer and is intended to reflect the different views and opinions expressed by the participants, in a manner that is as neutral and accurate as possible, based on the Chatham House rules which prevailed during the workshop.*

The workshop was opened by the host country and attended by about twenty participants from individual UN Member States, in addition to a couple of representatives of international organizations, NGOs and scientific bodies.

#### **Setting-the-scene**

Several presentations were made in a “setting-the-scene” session to introduce scientific findings, aggregated data, identified gaps as well as projected scenarios and proposed obligations and control measures on the production of primary plastic polymers (PPP).

A first presentation gave an introduction to the definition of PPP, which can be read as “*plastic materials made of synthetic and semi-synthetic polymers that are used for the first time to create plastic products in any form*”. This presentation also highlighted the conclusion of several scientific reports pointing out that sufficiently high PPP reduction targets were necessary to actually make a difference in reducing the cumulative plastic pollution.

A second presentation gave a reminder of the fact that global plastics use has quadrupled in the last 30 years and is expected to double by 2040 in a business-as-usual scenario, and that mismanaged waste and therefore plastic pollution is expected to follow the same trends in such scenario. Suggesting different prospective scenarios, this presentation emphasized that a focus on downstream measures only will not be sufficient to eliminate plastic leakage and might entail higher investment and macro-economic costs, concluding that a scenario with a balanced policy mix of both upstream – including on production – and downstream measures would be the most (cost) efficient way to end plastic pollution.

A third presentation introduced a climate perspective through emphasizing the sources of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions arising from the production of primary plastics production and the different implications for the climate budget to align with the 1.5°C target from the Paris Agreement. This study highlighted that the majority (75%) of GHG emissions from plastic production originated from the step prior to polymerization. Three polymers (PE, PET, and PP) account for the majority of the GHG emissions (~60%). Recalling that plastic production accounts for around 5.3% of global GHG emissions in 2019, the presentation considered different projected scenarios, concluding that even without future growth by 2050, primary plastic production could still account for 13-16% of the remaining carbon budget to 1.5°C and this figure could go up to 31% in a scenario of PPP 4% annual growth. The presentation also underlined the difficulty to decarbonize primary plastic production with the current available technologies.

One final presenter introduced findings from a recent study on polymer production pathways, emphasizing different scenarios, with different levels of ambition according to the policy packages and the set of direct control measures that could be applied to PPP through the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution (ILBI). Those scenarios range from

business-as-usual to a freeze in the current PPP production levels and/or a freeze cumulated to complete elimination and/or limit to certain polymers of concern. This presentation underlined that a freeze only scenario will not eliminate plastic pollution.

Altogether, those presentations emphasized the relationship between the production of PPP and the plastic pollution it may generate, justifying the potential need for obligations and control measures to address PPP in the ILBI.

### **Monitoring and transparency session**

The objective of this session was to explore what information is needed for and from Parties in terms of monitoring and transparency on production use to enable a proper implementation of the instrument.

An initial observation was made by one participant indicating that reporting on PPP levels is currently done on a voluntary basis only, without any authoritative harmonized framework that could help delegations having the full picture of plastics produced and better understand their impacts.

The conversation then emphasized the potential need to have more data on types and quantities of PPP produced to be able to adopt informed decisions, with one participant highlighting that “confidence comes from transparency”.

There was a broad understanding that the starting point for a provision on PPP could be a requirement for each Party to report on its production of PPP at the national level.

On the methodology to do so, several options were introduced with a preference expressed for each party to aggregate the data nationally rather than requiring all producing companies to disclose their information in a global database (which could raise confidentiality issues).

Several participants mentioned that such reporting should not only include data on production, but also on exports and imports to avoid any loophole, if some PPP-producing countries did not ratify the treaty. Other elements were also mentioned such as information to be reported by Parties on their production facilities, as well as accumulated stocks.

There was a broad understanding from the participants that additional discussion might be needed on the details of this reporting requirement, especially on the level of granularity and whether the provision needs to detail which types of polymers to report on.

### **Collective global ambition**

The objective of this session was to understand whether a collective global ambition on plastic production is needed in order to end plastic pollution, and to discuss technical aspects which require further elaboration, such as starting point, ambition level and start -and-strengthen approach.

Several participants voiced their support for a collective global ambition which could be translated, in their views, into an internationally agreed global target for the reduction of PPP to be achieved by a certain date and compared to a certain baseline. Those participants indicated that such collective global ambition would serve the purpose of setting ourselves an aspirational goal and would send the right signal, driving down the demand and inciting markets to start shifting from the current unsustainable trends of plastics produced.

Other participants indicated that a reduction of plastic production could still be achieved without setting such a global collective ambition in the instrument itself, but through nationally determined targets only (see below).

From there and building on the early presentations, there was an acknowledgment that current levels and trends of production are unsustainable, which could itself constitute a starting point

to justify the need for a provision on PPP, though some of the participants indicated that they have not finalized a public position on that matter.

It was clear from the room that further discussion among members was needed to elaborate on what would be a sustainable level of PPP production that could fit into such global collective ambition, as well as on the identification of a common baseline.

Several participants voiced their interest for a start-and-strengthen or step-wise approach which can be considered when identifying a potential compromise on the PPP provision. If such an approach would need further thinking, it could be understood as a way of acknowledging the need for a collective global ambition while recognizing the need for time and more scientific input for the members of the INC (and Parties to the future instrument) to be able to agree on the details and practicalities for the implementation of such an ambition.

### **Direct vs. indirect control measures**

A comprehensive exchange of views then allowed to go through the potential direct and indirect measures on PPP that could be introduced as part of the ILBI. It has been understood that direct measures would apply directly to the production, such as the implementation of national targets and/or the elimination or reduction of certain polymers, in opposition to indirect measures which would first target other stages of the plastic lifecycle, thus having a cascading impact on polymer production.

#### **On direct measures:**

A first discussion allowed for participants to voice their opinion on the establishment of national targets/limits on PPP production. Some highlighted that such national targets would help support the achievement of a collective global ambition (if so agreed upon) while others suggested that national targets could be sufficient as a standalone provision to achieve the ultimate objective of addressing the current unsustainable levels of production worldwide.

Different existing models were presented to set such national targets, including the precedents from the Montreal Protocol (with globally agreed national targets) in comparison to the Paris Agreement (with nationally determined targets). Support was expressed by participants to take inspiration from both of these models for the ILBI on plastic pollution, while highlighting that additional work would be needed to effectively translate them (including through a potentially mixed approach) in the core text of the instrument.

In particular, several participants pointed out that there was no “one-size-fits-all” solution and that further scientific and socioeconomic input would be needed for the INC to assess and agree on a potential breaking down of each region’s and each country’s contribution to the achievement of any collective global ambition.

The discussion did not reveal a specific interest from participants in direct measures on certain polymers deemed of concern under this provision dedicated to PPP. Instead, some pointed out that this could be covered by the provisions on products, depending on the application and use of each of these polymers.

#### **On indirect measures:**

The participants were then invited to consider synergies and interlinkages between potential provisions on PPP and other provisions currently proposed in the revised zero draft across the full lifecycle of plastics. In particular, several mentioned that provisions 3 (on problematic/avoid plastic products), 5a (on product design and performance), 5b (on reuse), and 5c (on the use of recycled content) and 5d (on the development of alternatives) were those which could have the most effective rebound/cascading effect on the production of PPP, if effectively implemented.

Many participants therefore highlighted that all current provisions in part II of the revised zero draft were intended to be mutually supportive and that provision 1 on PPP was not to be considered as a standalone provision but as part of a whole set of provisions that would eventually contribute to address PPP production levels.

Participants were then invited to consider the need for economic instruments and measures such as the establishment of a fee on PPP, as well as a reform of the subsidies to PPP. Different views were expressed with some participants highlighting a strong correlation between those tools and their potential impact on PPP production levels, while others suggesting they may not be needed or relevant for addressing PPP production (although recognizing the potential benefits of such measures for other purposes). Participants then elaborated on the potential interest in exploring alternative levies, such as positive fiscal incentives and/or through the consideration of economic instruments at the product level. Some participants recalled the importance of the polluter pays principle when exploring these kinds of measures.

### **Next steps:**

The participants acknowledged the added value of this informal workshop to exchange views, but most importantly to disseminate knowledge on PPP. Several participants highlighted the importance of pursuing these efforts to better translate science and existing knowledge on PPP into more accessible content for policy-makers that will enable negotiators to make informed decisions during the INC sessions.

One participant called for the host country of this workshop to pursue the informal discussion on PPP, possibly in a wider group, also indicating that the discussion in itself could constitute an outcome that would need further elaboration with the rest of the INC membership.

The participants also called for different ways to value and build on the views expressed during the workshop, through among other things:

- a potential mandate given to the Secretariat to call for and aggregate scientific input on PPP,
- a potential mandate given to the Chair for convening intersessional scientific/technical work to provide a platform for exchanging views and build common understanding on any outstanding issues<sup>1</sup> related to PPP,
- the organization and facilitation of similar presentations to those delivered in the “setting-the-scene” session during the INC sessions, either through webinars, side-events or during in-person regional group meetings, to further disseminate the knowledge on PPP.

Ahead of INC-4 and looking at the range of outstanding issues and diversity of views expressed, the participants considered it premature to initiate any work on a compromise draft of the treaty provision on PPP.

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<sup>1</sup> **Non-exhaustive list of outstanding issues and potential questions raised during the workshop that might require further elaboration in the next steps:**

- Is there a need for intersessional scientific work to be asked in Ottawa at INC-4 on PPP?
- Is additional data and work needed to better understand what is a global sustainable production level?
- Is there a need for further scientific and socioeconomic inputs to determine a breakdown of a collective global ambition to a regional and national level?
- Is there a need for additional work to translate Montreal Protocol, Minamata Convention and Paris Agreement type of provisions in the ILBI on plastic pollution?
- Is there a need for additional discussion on the level of granularity for reporting (polymer types, included chemicals)?
- Is there a need to better understand the possibility of using levies on products and positive fiscal incentives as other tools that could be explored to reduce PPP?