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**United Nations  
Environment Assembly of the  
United Nations Environment  
Programme**

**Ad hoc open-ended expert group  
on marine litter and microplastics  
Third meeting  
Bangkok, 18–22 November 2019**

**Compilation of United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on  
marine litter and microplastics**

**Note by the Secretariat**

1. The Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group (AHEG) was established through the United Nations Environment Assembly in its resolution UNEP/EA.3/Res.7 paragraph 10, and its mandate was extended through resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res.6 subparagraph 7.
2. This document is a compilation of the following four United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on marine litter and microplastics:
  - i. UNEP/EA.1/Res.6: Marine plastic debris and microplastics (2014)
  - ii. UNEP/EA.2/Res.11: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2016)
  - iii. UNEP/EA.3/Res.7: Marine litter and microplastics (2017)
  - iv. UNEP/EA.4/Res.6: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2019)

## 1/6. Marine plastic debris and microplastics

*The United Nations Environment Assembly,*

*Recalling* the concern reflected in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”,<sup>1</sup> that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen-based compounds, from numerous marine and land-based sources, and the commitment to take action to significantly reduce the incidence and impacts of such pollution on marine ecosystems,

*Noting* the international action being taken to promote the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and waste in ways that lead to the prevention and minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment,

*Recalling* the Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities adopted by the Third Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, which highlighted the relevance of the Honolulu Strategy and the Honolulu Commitment and recommended the establishment of a global partnership on marine litter,

*Taking note* of the decisions adopted by the eleventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on addressing the impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity,

*Recalling* that the General Assembly declared 2014 the International Year of Small Island Developing States and that such States have identified waste management among their priorities for action,

*Noting with concern* the serious impact which marine litter, including plastics stemming from land and sea-based sources, can have on the marine environment, marine ecosystem services, marine natural resources, fisheries, tourism and the economy, as well as the potential risks to human health;

1. *Stresses* the importance of the precautionary approach according to which lack of full scientific certainty should not be used for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation, where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage;
2. *Recognizes* the significant risks arising from the inadequate management and disposal of plastic and the need to take action;
3. *Encourages* Governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, industry and other relevant actors to cooperate with the Global Partnership on Marine Litter in its implementation of the Honolulu Strategy and to facilitate information exchange through the online marine litter network;
4. *Recognizes* that plastics, including microplastics, in the marine environment are a rapidly increasing problem due to their large and still increasing use combined with the inadequate management and disposal of plastic waste, and because plastic debris in the marine environment is steadily fragmenting into secondary microplastics;
5. *Also recognizes* the need for more knowledge and research on the source and fate of microplastics and their impact on biodiversity, marine ecosystems and human health, noting recent knowledge that such particles can be ingested by biota and could be transferred to higher levels in the marine food chain, causing adverse effects;
6. *Notes* that microplastics may also contribute to the transfer in the marine ecosystems of persistent organic pollutants, other persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic substances and other contaminants which are in or adhere to the particles;
7. *Recognizes* that microplastics in the marine environment originate from a wide range of sources, including the breakdown of plastic debris in the oceans, industrial emissions and sewage and run-off from the use of products containing microplastics;
8. *Emphasizes* that further urgent action is needed to address the challenges posed by marine plastic debris and microplastics, by addressing such materials at source, by reducing pollution through improved waste management practices and by cleaning up existing debris and litter;
9. *Welcomes* the establishment of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter launched in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 and the convening of the first Partnership Forum in 2013;

10. *Also welcomes* the adoption by the contracting parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) at its eighteenth ordinary meeting, held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3 to 6 December 2013, of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter Management, the world's first such action plan, and welcomes the draft Action Plan on Marine Litter for the North-East Atlantic region awaiting adoption by the Commission of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic at its meeting in Cascais, Portugal, and encourages Governments to collaborate through relevant regional seas conventions and river commissions with a view to adopting such action plans in their regions;

11. *Requests* the Executive Director to support countries, upon their request, in the development and implementation of national or regional action plans to reduce marine litter;

12. *Welcomes* the initiative by the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection to produce an assessment report on microplastics, which is scheduled to be launched in November 2014;

13. *Also welcomes* the work undertaken by the International Whaling Commission on assessing the impacts of marine debris on cetaceans and the endorsement by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals at its tenth meeting of resolution 10.4, addressing the impacts of marine debris on migratory species;

14. *Requests* the Executive Director, in consultation with other relevant institutions and stakeholders, to undertake a study on marine plastic debris and marine microplastics, building on existing work and taking into account the most up-to-date studies and data, focusing on:

- (a) Identification of the key sources of marine plastic debris and microplastics;
- (b) Identification of possible measures and best available techniques and environmental practices to prevent the accumulation and minimize the level of microplastics in the marine environment;
- (c) Recommendations for the most urgent actions;
- (d) Specification of areas especially in need of more research, including key impacts on the environment and on human health;
- (e) Any other relevant priority areas identified in the assessment of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection;

15. *Invites* the secretariats of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and relevant organizations involved in pollution control and chemicals and waste management and the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species and the regional seas conventions and action plans to contribute to the study described in paragraph 14 of the present resolution;

16. *Encourages* Governments and the private sector to promote the more resource-efficient use and sound management of plastics and microplastics;

17. *Also encourages* Governments to take comprehensive action to address the marine plastic debris and microplastic issue through, where appropriate, legislation, enforcement of international agreements, provision of adequate reception facilities for ship-generated wastes, improvement of waste management practices and support for beach clean-up activities, as well as information, education and public awareness programmes;

18. *Invites* Governments, intergovernmental organizations, the scientific community, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders to share relevant information with the Executive Director pertinent to the study described in paragraph 14;

19. *Invites* those in a position to do so to provide financial and other support to conduct the study identified in paragraph 14;

20. *Requests* the Executive Director to present the study on microplastics for the consideration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session.

## 2/11. Marine plastic litter and microplastics

*The United Nations Environment Assembly,*

*Recalling* the concern reflected in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, that the oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine litter – especially plastic – persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen-based compounds, from numerous marine and land-based sources, and the commitment to reduce such pollution,

*Recalling also* the Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, which highlighted the relevance of the Honolulu Strategy and the Honolulu Commitment for the prevention and management of marine debris and called for the establishment of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, which was subsequently launched at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and hosted by the Global Programme of Action,

*Noting* the increased knowledge regarding the levels, sources, negative effects of and possible measures to reduce marine plastic debris and microplastics in the marine environment, as summarized in, among other sources, the 2016 study “Marine plastic debris and microplastics: global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change”, on marine plastic debris and microplastics, the preparation of which was mandated by the Environment Assembly in its resolution 1/6,

*Noting also* that the report of the First World Ocean Assessment points to the emerging issue of the smallest microplastic particles, which are nano-sized, and expresses concern about the ability of microplastics to enter marine food chains and the potential risk for the environment and human health,

*Noting with concern* that plastic and microplastics may be transported through freshwater systems such as rivers and are found in all compartments of the marine environment; that their input is rapidly increasing; that the plastics in the marine environment degrade extremely slowly; that the plastics contain and can adsorb and emit chemicals, such as persistent organic pollutants, and can contribute to their distribution and the spread of harmful organisms; and that all this has negative effects on marine life, ecosystems and ecosystem services, including fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism as well as local societies and economies,

*Reaffirming* General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recalling Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”, and recognizing the importance of other relevant Sustainable Development Goal targets, as well as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, for effective implementation,

*Noting* that the General Assembly in its resolution 70/235 of 23 December 2015, on oceans and the law of the sea, expressed concern regarding the negative effects of marine debris and microplastics and urged States to take action,

*Recognizing* the importance of cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and conventions and international instruments related to preventing and minimizing marine pollution from waste, including marine plastic litter, microplastics and associated chemicals and their adverse effects on human health and the environment, such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management,

1. *Recognizes* that the presence of plastic litter and microplastics<sup>1</sup> in the marine environment is a rapidly increasing serious issue of global concern that needs an urgent global response taking into account a product life-cycle approach, and acknowledging that the levels and sources of marine plastic litter and microplastics, and the resources available to tackle the issue, can vary between regions, and that measures need to be taken and adapted as appropriate to local, national and regional situations;

2. *Recalls* its resolution 1/6, “Marine plastic debris and microplastics”, and urges all States that have not yet done so to implement fully all its relevant recommendations and decisions, including through national measures and regional, international and cross-sectoral cooperation;

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<sup>1</sup> Plastic particles less than 5 millimetres in diameter, including nano-sized particles.

3. *Welcomes* the activities of the relevant United Nations bodies and organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Maritime Organization, which act in coordination with the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics; encourages the active contribution of all stakeholders to their work; and acknowledges the importance of cooperation and information sharing between the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Maritime Organization, as well as the cooperation under the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, on this matter;

4. *Acknowledges* the regional action plans on marine litter under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and the Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northwest Pacific Region; welcomes the ongoing development of such plans for the Black Sea, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution; welcomes the Group of Seven<sup>2</sup> action plan to combat marine litter; and urges other Governments and regions to collaborate to establish such action plans where relevant;

5. *Welcomes* the work under the aegis of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Whaling Commission and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals on impacts of marine debris on marine biological diversity, and under the aegis of the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region on pollution from vessels and from land-based sources, and calls for the coordination of that work with other relevant work in the framework of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter;

6. *Also welcomes* the report<sup>3</sup> of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme on the implementation of the Assembly's resolution 1/6 on marine plastic debris and microplastics, takes note of the Executive Director's recommendations, and urges that they be evaluated, and possibly implemented as relevant and appropriate, including through strengthened national, regional and international measures, cooperation and action plans, prioritizing important sources and impacts and cost-effective measures, cooperation with industry, civil society and other stakeholders to reduce the input, level and impact of plastic debris and microplastics in the oceans;

7. *Stresses* that prevention and environmentally sound management of waste are keys to long-term success in combating marine pollution, including marine plastic debris and microplastics, calls on Member States to establish and implement necessary policies, regulatory frameworks and measures consistent with the waste hierarchy, and in this context stresses the importance of providing capacity-building and that Member States should consider financial assistance to developing countries, least developed countries and in particular small island developing States for the realization of these objectives;

8. *Welcomes* the United Nations Environment Programme massive open online course on marine litter; the United Nations World Ocean Day 2016 with the theme "Healthy Oceans, Healthy Planet"; and the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which in 2016 will focus on marine debris, plastics and microplastics, and notes, in this regard, the report of the Secretary-General prepared for the meeting;<sup>4</sup>

9. *Recognizes* that surface runoff, rivers and sewage outfalls are important pathways for litter transfer from land to the sea; also recognizes the need for measures to combat the littering of freshwater courses, including measures to adapt to extreme storms, flooding and other relevant effects of climate change; and encourages international cooperation on transboundary watercourses in that regard, where relevant;

10. *Also recognizes* that education, capacity-building, knowledge transfer and awareness-raising regarding sources and negative effects of and measures to reduce and prevent marine plastic debris and microplastics, as well as environmentally sound waste management systems and clean-up actions, are crucial;

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<sup>2</sup> Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> UNEP/EA.2/5.

<sup>4</sup> A/71/74.

11. *Requests* the Executive Director, within available resources, to assist Member States, especially developing countries, with emphasis on small island developing States and least developed countries, upon their request, in the development and implementation of national or regional measures and action plans; invites those in a position to do so to support such action; and recognizes that targeted measures in regions that are the largest sources of marine litter are especially important for the global reduction of marine plastic debris and microplastics;

12. *Recognizes* the need to identify transport and distribution pathways and hotspots of marine litter, to cooperate regionally and internationally to clean up such hotspots where appropriate, and to develop environmentally sound systems and methods for removal and sound disposal of marine litter; stresses that removal is urgent in areas where it poses an immediate threat to sensitive marine and coastal ecosystems or marine-based livelihoods or local societies; and recognizes that removal actions should, as far as possible, be risk-based and cost-effective, following best available techniques and environmental practices and the polluter pays approach;

13. *Encourages* Governments at all levels to further develop partnerships with industry and civil society and establish public-private partnerships, including with regard to environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic packaging and deposit refund systems; to raise awareness of the sources and negative effects of and possible measures for reducing marine plastic debris and microplastics; to promote change in individual and corporate behaviour; and to cooperate in the prevention and clean-up of marine plastic debris; and, in that regard, invites initiatives for the development of sustainable tourism, including through the Sustainable Tourism Programme of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns;

14. *Recognizes* the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and regional fisheries bodies and management organizations to mitigate and clean up abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear, and encourages Member States and Governments at all levels to include such measures in national and regional action plans to combat marine litter, as relevant, noting that cost-effective technologies and practices are available;

15. *Underlines* the need for the sharing of knowledge and experience on the best available techniques and environmental practices for reducing littering from the fishing industry and aquaculture, and for implementation of pilot projects where appropriate, including in respect of deposit schemes, voluntary agreements and recovery, in particular through prevention and, reduction, reuse and recycling (the “three Rs”);

16. *Recognizes* the role of the International Maritime Organization in mitigating marine litter; recalls annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; and agrees on the need to reduce illegal dumping of litter in the sea, including through the establishment and use of effective port reception facilities, the identification and, as appropriate, recovery of costs related to the disposal of garbage and waste, including through harbour fees, and consideration of other incentives and innovative approaches;

17. *Acknowledges* the findings of the 2016 study of the United Nations Environment Programme on marine plastic debris and microplastics<sup>5</sup> on the most important global sources of and possible measures for avoiding microplastics entering the marine environment, and recognizes that Governments need to further identify the most significant sources, as well as important and cost-effective preventive measures at the national and regional levels; invites Governments to undertake such prioritized measures nationally and through regional and international cooperation and in cooperation with industry, as appropriate, and to share their experiences; and urges the phasing out of the use of primary microplastic particles in products, including, wherever possible, products such as personal care products, industrial abrasives and printing products, and their replacement with organic or mineral non-hazardous compounds;

18. *Encourages* product manufacturers and others to consider the life cycle environmental impacts of products containing microbeads and compostable polymers, including possible downstream impacts that may compromise the recycling of plastic waste; to eliminate or reduce the use of primary microplastic particles in products, including, wherever possible, products such as personal care products, industrial abrasives and printing products; to ensure that any replacement products are environmentally sound; and to cooperate in the environmentally sound management of such plastic waste;

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<sup>5</sup> *Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics: Global Lessons and Research to Inspire Action and Guide Policy Change*, UNEP, 2016.

19. *Also encourages* the establishment of harmonized international definitions and terminology concerning the size of, and compatible standards and methods for the monitoring and assessment of, marine plastic debris and microplastics, as well as the establishment of and cooperation on cost-effective monitoring, building as far as possible on ongoing related monitoring programmes and considering alternative automated and remote sensing technology where possible and relevant;

20. *Underlines* that, while research already undertaken provides sufficient evidence of the need for immediate action, more research is needed on marine plastic debris and microplastics, including associated chemicals, and especially on environmental and social impacts – including on human health – and on pathways, fluxes and fate, including fragmentation and degradation rates, in all marine compartments and especially in water bodies and sediment deposits of the coastal and open ocean, as well as on impacts on fisheries, aquaculture and economy; and urges Governments at all levels and Member States in a position to do so to support such research;

21. *Requests* the Executive Director, in close cooperation with other relevant bodies and organizations, to undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches to combat marine plastic litter and microplastics, taking into consideration the relevant international, regional and subregional regulatory frameworks and identifying possible gaps and options for addressing them, including through regional cooperation and coordination, and to present the assessment to the Environment Assembly at its next session, within available resources for this purpose;

22. *Invites* States, in cooperation with industry and other stakeholders, at the national, subregional, regional and international levels, to organize and/or participate in annual campaigns for awareness-raising, prevention and environmentally sound clean-up of marine litter, including in coastal areas and oceans, to support and supplement the civil-society-driven beach clean-up days;

23. *Invites* those in a position to do so to provide financial and other support for follow-up to the present resolution;

24. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the Environment Assembly at its third session on progress in the implementation of the present resolution.

*6th plenary meeting  
27 May 2016*

### 3/7. Marine litter and microplastics

*The United Nations Environment Assembly,*

*Reaffirming* General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recalling Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”,

*Recalling* its resolutions 1/6, entitled “Marine plastic debris and microplastics,” and 2/11, entitled “Marine plastic litter and microplastics,” on measures to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics,

*Acknowledging* the increased knowledge on the levels, sources, negative effects of and measures to reduce marine litter and microplastics, as summarized in the 2016 assessment report by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled *Marine plastic debris and microplastics: Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change*, the First World Ocean Assessment and numerous other reports and scientific publications,

*Noting* the report entitled “Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches” prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme pursuant to Environment Assembly resolution 2/11,

*Noting also* the commitment of member States to the “Our ocean, our future: call for action” declaration, adopted at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, in June 2017, and the voluntary commitments presented there, at the Our Ocean conferences held in Washington D.C., Valparaiso, Chile, and Valletta, Malta, and at the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, as well as the Group of 20 Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted in 2017, on efforts to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics,

*Noting further* the International Coral Reef Initiative recommendation to reduce plastic microbead pollution in the marine environment, adopted in November 2016, and the call for action by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme on plastic microbeads,

*Noting with concern* the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine plastic litter and the expected increase in negative effects on marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism, local societies and economies, and the urgent need for strengthened knowledge of the levels and effects of microplastics and nanoplastics on marine ecosystems, seafood and human health,

*Recognizing with concern* that natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events cause significant input of litter and microplastics to the marine environment,

*Underlining* that preventive action through waste minimization and environmentally sound waste management should be given the highest priority and that that is especially important in geographical areas with the largest sources of marine plastic litter, and recognizing that technology and effective measures already exist that may provide cost-effective, environmentally sound and locally and regionally adapted solutions,

*Emphasizing* that technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and resource mobilization from all sources are important elements to combating marine litter and microplastics,

*Acknowledging* the challenges of addressing marine plastic pollution in the face of increasing production and consumption of plastic in products and packaging, and urging all countries and other stakeholders to make responsible use of plastic while endeavouring to reduce the unnecessary use of plastic and to promote research and application of environmentally sound alternatives,

1. *Stresses* the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics;
2. *Urges* all actors to step up actions to “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”;
3. *Encourages* all member States, based on best available knowledge of sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, to prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment;
4. *Also encourages* all member States and invites other actors, taking into account national conditions:
  - (a) To fully implement the recommendations and actions set out in its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11, as

relevant, and emphasizes that those resolutions have important elements and guidance that are not repeated in the present resolution;

(b) To cooperate to establish common definitions and harmonized standards and methodologies for the measurement and monitoring of marine litter and microplastics;

(c) To develop and implement action plans for preventing marine litter and the discharge of microplastics; encouraging resource efficiency, and increasing collection and recycling rates of plastic waste and re-design and re-use of products and materials; and avoiding the unnecessary use of plastic and plastic containing chemicals of particular concern where appropriate;

(d) To include marine litter and microplastics in local, national and regional waste management plans and in wastewater treatment where appropriate;

(e) To develop integrated and source-to-sea approaches to combat marine litter and microplastics from all sources, taking into account that plastic litter and microplastics are transported to the oceans from land-based sources by rivers and run-off or wind from land and that plastic litter is an important source of microplastics, and include the land/sea and freshwater/sea interface in action plans for preventing marine litter, including microplastics;

(f) To step up measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics from sea-based sources, such as fisheries, aquaculture, off-shore installations and shipping, including through the promotion of accessibility and use of port reception facilities;

(g) To encourage the inclusion of measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics, in particular from land-based sources, in plans to prevent and reduce damage from natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events;

(h) To prioritize, where feasible, clean-up of the marine environment in areas where marine litter poses a significant threat to human health, biodiversity, wildlife and the coastal ecosystems, conducted in a cost-effective way;

5. *Recognizes* that the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, can contribute significantly to preventing and reducing marine litter and microplastics, including through information sharing, awareness-raising, developing new environmentally sound technologies, capacity-building and clean-up actions, and encourages cooperation between Governments, regional bodies, the private sector and civil society, including through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and its regional nodes, to that end;

6. *Notes* the important role of key sectors such as plastics producers, retailers and the consumer goods industry, as well as importers, packaging firms and transport firms, to contribute to the reduction of marine litter, including microplastics, arising from their products and activities, as well as to provide information on the impacts arising from their products throughout their life cycle, and encourages innovative approaches such as the use of extended producer responsibility schemes, container deposit schemes and other initiatives;

7. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to strengthen the capacity and activity of the United Nations Environment Programme on marine litter and microplastics, including by:

(a) Strengthening the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter;

(b) Providing advice on the prioritizing of activities upon request based on best available scientific knowledge, and the most environmentally sound and cost-effective measures to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics, according to resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution;

(c) Facilitating the establishment and implementation of regional and national action plans to prevent and reduce litter and microplastics in the marine environment, as requested by member States;

(d) Supporting countries, upon request and in collaboration with other international organizations and relevant stakeholders, in closing data gaps and improving the availability of accessible data on the sources and extent of marine litter and microplastics in the environment;

(e) Closely liaising with other United Nations agencies to encourage them to support programmes to reduce marine litter and microplastics;

8. *Invites* relevant international and regional organizations and conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the

International Maritime Organization and its conventions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, regional seas conventions and programmes, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, as appropriate within their mandates, to increase their action to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics and their harmful effects and to coordinate where appropriate to achieve that end;

9. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources and in cooperation with other relevant bodies and international initiatives, to compile voluntary commitments, as applicable, targeting marine litter and microplastics; to provide an overview of their scope in support of the work of the United Nations Environment Assembly on that issue; to better understand progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 14.1; and to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the matter;

10. *Decides* to convene, subject to the availability of resources, meetings of an open-ended ad hoc expert group to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and:

- (a) *Requests* the Executive Director to provide the secretariat for that work;
- (b) *Decides* that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will be informed by and build on, among others, relevant resolutions, decisions and reports by the United Nations Environment Programme, other organizations, member States and stakeholders as appropriate;
- (c) *Decides* that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will include experts with the relevant technical expertise from all member States, representation from international and regional conventions and organizations and relevant stakeholders;
- (d) *Decides* that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will have the following initial programme of work:
  - (i) To explore all barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics, including challenges related to resources in developing countries;
  - (ii) To identify the range of national, regional and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches, and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches;
  - (iii) To identify environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of different response options;
  - (iv) To examine the feasibility and effectiveness of different response options;
  - (v) To identify potential options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly;
- (e) *Decides* to convene at least one meeting, but no more than two meetings, before the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, including enabling the participation of developing countries;
- (f) *Requests* the Executive Director to provide a progress update to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the programme of work, including on the results of the meeting(s);
- (g) *Decides* to determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of the work at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly;

11. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the implementation of its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution.

#### 4/6. Marine plastic litter and microplastics

*The United Nations Environment Assembly,*

*Noting with concern* that the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale, negatively affecting marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, societies, livelihoods, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation, tourism and economies,

*Noting* that microplastics added to products or generated during their life cycle are found along the food chain and that there is therefore concern about their potential to negatively affect human health, including food safety, and that those aspects thus require further examination,

*Reiterating* the importance of the long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics into the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics, as stressed in Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics,

*Stressing also* the importance of the prevention and reduction of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, from both land and sea-based sources, for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup> and the Sustainable Development Goals,

*Stressing further* the importance of more sustainable management of plastics throughout their life cycle in order to increase sustainable consumption and production patterns, including but not limited to the circular economy and other sustainable economic models, and the importance of environmentally sound waste management, resource efficiency, the “three Rs” (reduce, reuse, recycle), sustainable materials management, innovation in related technologies, the environmentally sound clean-up of marine plastic litter, and international cooperation for effectively preventing pollution from marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics,

*Stressing* the urgent need to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels and to do more to support science-based approaches; improve understanding of the fate, distribution and impact of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, on the marine environment; and promote local, national, regional and global action to prevent and eliminate the discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment,

*Underlining* the urgent need to consider a strengthened science-policy interface and global coordination, cooperation and governance to more effectively implement its resolutions 1/6 on marine plastic debris and microplastics, 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics and 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics,

*Taking note* of important developments with regard to exploring options within the mandates of relevant existing international agreements and organizations for addressing marine litter, in particular:

(a) The recommendations of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its fourteenth meeting to consider further options under the Convention, including establishing a partnership on plastic waste;

(b) The adoption of an action plan by the International Maritime Organization Marine Environment Protection Committee, supported by the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (1972) and the Protocol thereto, to reduce marine plastic litter from ships;

*Recognizing* the work of the regional seas conventions and programmes for the protection of the marine and coastal environment and reiterating its invitation to regional and international organizations and conventions to increase their action to prevent and reduce marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, and the harmful effects thereof and, where appropriate, coordinate such action to achieve that end,

*Acknowledging* the need for high-quality data and effective monitoring of land- and sea-based sources, and of quantities and the fate and impact of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, and its potential impact on human health, through harmonized methodologies, to enable better and more effective action,

*Noting* the framework document for the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, agreed upon by its steering committee in October 2018, which outlined the purpose, function and organization of the Global

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

Partnership as a platform for all stakeholders for bottom-up, voluntary cooperation on activities such as the sharing of experience and information and “matchmaking” for project cooperation,

*Taking into account* the outcome of the work of the open-ended ad hoc expert group on marine litter and microplastics, established by the Environment Assembly at its third session by its resolution 3/7, and in particular the need to increase coherence, coordination and synergies between existing mechanisms and to enhance cooperation and governance with a view to better addressing the challenges posed by marine litter and microplastics at the local, national, regional and global levels,

*Mindful* of the particular responsibility of the United Nations Environment Programme, pursuant to its mandate,<sup>7</sup> to keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments,

1. *Calls upon* Member States and other actors at the local, national, regional and international levels, including in the private sector, civil society and academia, to address the problem of marine litter and microplastics, prioritizing a whole-life-cycle approach and resource efficiency, building on existing initiatives and instruments, and supported by and grounded in science, international cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, subject to the availability of resources and benefiting from the work of existing mechanisms, to immediately strengthen scientific and technological knowledge with regard to marine litter, including marine plastic litter and microplastics, through the following activities:

(a) Convening existing relevant science advisory initiatives with input from Member States, as appropriate, to provide input into the activities outlined in paragraphs 3 and 7 of the present resolution;

(b) Compiling available scientific and other relevant data and information to prepare an assessment on sources, pathways and hazards of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics pollution, and its presence in rivers and oceans; scientific knowledge about adverse effects on ecosystems and potential adverse effects on human health; and environmentally sound technological innovations;

(c) Recommending indicators to harmonize monitoring, reporting and assessment methodologies, taking into account key sources of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, in cooperation with relevant international organizations;

(d) Gathering information with a view to informing policies and action regarding environmentally sound technological innovations, options and measures for reducing the risk of discharges of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment, taking into account the whole life cycle of plastics, in support of local, national, regional and global action;

3. *Decides* to strengthen coordination and cooperation by establishing, subject to the availability of resources and building on existing initiatives, a multi-stakeholder platform within the United Nations Environment Programme to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination, through a life-cycle approach, of discharges of litter and microplastics into the oceans. This may include the following functions:

(a) Serving as a forum for enabling governments, industry, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to share experiences and coordinate action on a regular or ad hoc basis;

(b) Serving as a repository for assessments of the ways in which land- and sea-based sources of marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, are addressed at the national, regional and international levels; conceptual and practical guidance materials to help governments, organizations and private entities address aspects of marine litter; and current action plans, management practices and guidelines for enabling, enhancing and supporting action to prevent the discharge of litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, into the marine environment;

(c) Raising global awareness of the issue with a wide variety of audiences, including governments, policymakers, resource managers, educators, private-sector entities and the public;

(d) Establishing and maintaining a database of technical and scientific information related to marine litter, such as inventories of discharges into the marine environment, scientific studies and innovations to address marine litter;

(e) Promoting collaboration among relevant scientific mechanisms to facilitate access to scientific data and information in order to disseminate sound scientific practices, such as guidelines for the sampling and analysis of marine macroplastics and microplastics, and to improve the policy relevance of research;

<sup>7</sup> See General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972.

(f) Promoting action in the framework of regional seas conventions and programmes, subject to the availability of resources, to address marine litter through action plans, protocols, partnerships and other activities;

4. *Recalls* its resolution 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics and invites Member States, in close collaboration with the private sector, to:

(a) Reduce the discharge of microplastics into the marine environment, including, where possible, through the phasing out of products that contain microplastics;

(b) Foster innovation in product design to reduce secondary microplastics release from land- and sea-based sources and improve waste management where needed;

(c) Prevent losses of primary microplastics, in particular pre-production pellets (flakes and powders), to prevent spillage into the environment across the whole manufacturing and supply chain;

5. *Requests* the Executive Director, through the United Nations Environment Programme's 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns,<sup>8</sup> to develop guidelines for the use and production of plastics in order to inform consumers, including about standards and labels; to incentivize businesses and retailers to commit themselves to using sustainable practices and products; and to support governments in promoting the use of information tools and incentives to foster sustainable consumption and production;

6. *Invites* all Member States, relevant organizations in the United Nations system, other relevant regional and international organizations, the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations and individuals, on every appropriate occasion, including such opportunities as World Environment Day and World Oceans Day, to:

(a) Consider the contribution they can make to addressing marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

(b) Raise awareness of the importance of, and encourage, sustainable consumption and production, in line with Environment Assembly resolution 4/1 on innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production, with regard to products likely to generate marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

(c) Promote environmentally sound waste management and marine plastic litter recovery in line with paragraph 4 (h) of Environment Assembly resolution 3/7;

7. *Decides* to extend until its fifth session the mandate of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics established by its resolution 3/7, and requests 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;

8. *Invites* the Environment Management Group to engage in and contribute to the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics by providing, inter alia, mapping of all United Nations agencies, programmes, initiatives and other sources of expertise relating to marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics;

9. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session on the progress achieved in the implementation of the present resolution.

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<sup>8</sup> A/CONF.216/5, annex.