

3. UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

Summary of role: *UN Environment Programme (UNEP) coordinates the United Nations' environmental activities and assists developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. UNEP supports global actions on marine plastics litter and microplastics according to the mandate given at UNEA meetings.*

Summary of recommendations and work status: *UNEP has undertaken various actions to support global actions on marine plastic litter:*

- (i) Hosting the global programme of action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities*
- (ii) Developing the Global Partnership on Marine Litter initiative (GPML) with other UN Bodies*
- (iii) Launching the Clean Seas campaign*
- (iv) Publishing technical guidelines, toolkits and reports on marine litter and microplastics including single-use plastics*

Keywords/research fields: *UN Environment Programme; UNEP; function and mandate; technical guides; toolkits and reports; Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global Review of National Laws and Regulations; Combatting marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international; regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches; Marine Plastic debris and microplastics - Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change; Guidelines on Survey and Monitoring of Marine Litter; Clean Seas; single-use plastics; Global Partnership on Marine Litter; GPML*

3.1 Function and mandate

UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental agency within the UN system. It seeks to support implementation of the global environmental agenda adopted by UNEA and promote the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. It is the UN coordinator for this portfolio.

Global action on marine litter was initiated within UNEP and in the context of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), established in 1995. (For more details on the GPA refer to [Part 1, Section 3.4.1](#) below.) Under the GPA, UNEP established the Global Partnership on Marine Litter initiative described in [Part 1, Section 3.3.3](#) below, which is now a vehicle of implementation of decisions from UNEA.

UNEP also supports the cooperation for the protection of the marine environment at the regional level through its Regional Seas Programme, initiated in 1974. Currently, seven of these cooperation mechanisms in marine environmental protection are administered by UNEP including the East Asian

Seas. Available: <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/working-regional-seas>.

UNEA also mandated the Executive Director of UNEP to assist states in the development and implementation of regional measures and action plans, in particular in regions that are the largest sources of marine litter and with the greatest potential to contribute to the global reduction of marine plastic pollution [UNEP/UNEA.2/Res.11, para 11].

3.2 Technical guides, toolkits and reports

The work of UNEP and the impetus provided by the decisions of UNEA have resulted in the publication of numerous reports and collaborative initiatives. Important reports that are often referred to and relate to research on different aspects of pollution from marine plastics and microplastics are set out below.

- UNEP (2018) Compilation of the UN Environment Assembly resolutions on marine litter and microplastics, UNEP/AHEG/2018/1/INF/2. Available: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/adhoc-oeeeg-information-documents>.
- UNEP (2018) Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global Review of National Laws and Regulations. Available: <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/publication/legal-limits-single-use-plastics-and-microplastics-global-review-national>.
- UNEP (2017) Combatting marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches, UNEP/EA.3/INF/5. Available: https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/unep_ahег_2018_inf3_full_assessment_en.pdf.
- UNEP (2016) Marine Plastic debris and microplastics – Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi. Available: <https://wedocs.unep.org/rest/bitstreams/11700/retrieve>.
- Marine Litter: A Global Challenge, 2009 (By UNEP, GPA and Ocean Conservancy). Available: <http://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7787>.
- UNEP/IOC (2009) Guidelines on Survey and Monitoring of Marine Litter, Regional Seas Reports and Studies No.186, IOC Technical Series No.83. Available <http://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.11822/13604>.

3.3 Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML)

Summary of role: *The Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) is a multi-stakeholder partnership of state and non-state actors working to prevent marine litter with the aim of sharing knowledge and experience and advancing solutions to this pressing global issue. Its mission is to protect the global marine environment, human well-being and animal welfare by primarily enhancing international coordination and cooperation to combat the global problem of marine litter.*

Summary of work status: *A GPML Platform was created to serve as a database on all measures such as treaties, decisions, action plans and projects relating to marine litter worldwide*

Keywords/research fields: *Global Partnership on Marine Litter; GPML; establishment; Manila Declaration; Honolulu Strategy; objectives; GPML platform; regional node; webinars; online course; training of trainers workshop;*

3.3.1 Establishment: Manila Declaration and Honolulu Strategy

The GPML was established by UNEP in 2012 and announced at Rio+20 prior to the establishment of UNEA. In 2012, member states of the GPA adopted the Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation of the GPA. This Declaration identified marine litter as a priority source category for action for 2012–2016 and triggered the development of the GPML. For more details on the GPA and Manila Declaration, refer to [Part 1, Section 3.4.1](#) below.

The GPML aims to further the implementation of the 2011 Honolulu Strategy, which is a global framework for prevention and management of marine debris developed in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States of America.

The GPML is a global partnership gathering international agencies, governments, NGOs, academia, private sector, civil society and individuals. UN partners include the IMO, FAO and UNESCO-IOC. The FAO provides technical advice to the GPML on the impacts of marine pollution on fisheries and aquaculture.

3.3.2 Objectives

Objectives of the GPML include:

- To reduce the impacts of marine litter worldwide on economies, ecosystem, animal welfare and human health;
- To enhance international cooperation and coordination;
- To promote knowledge management, information sharing and monitoring of progress;
- To promote resource efficiency and economic development through waste prevention and by recovering valuable material and/or energy from waste;

- To increase awareness on sources of marine litter, their fate and impacts; and
- To assess emerging issues related to the fate and potential influence of marine litter, including (micro) plastics uptake in the food web and associated transfer of pollutants and impacts on the conservation and welfare of marine fauna.

3.3.3 The GPML platform and regional node

The GPML functions as a network with regional nodes and includes a web-based platform designated to facilitate collaboration among supporting partners. Further information is available at <http://marinelitternetwork.com/global-membership/>. See also the 2018 GPML Framework Document, UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/INF/25. Available: http://marinelitternetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/gpml_framework_document.pdf.

The GPML platform uses Ecolex as source-database of relevant legal instruments, policies, global and regional action plans, regulations, court decisions and other relevant material on the topic of marine debris (available: <http://marinelitternetwork.com/global-projects/legal/>). The platform also has a listing of global projects on marine litter divided into different categories such as action plans, awareness, clean-up, coordination, education, emergency response, facilitation, monitoring, prevention, removal, report and research (available <http://marinelitternetwork.com/all-projects/>).

There is currently no regional node for Southeast Asia. However, efforts are being undertaken within the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) to develop a regional node for Southeast Asia that would be as inclusive as possible. At the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting 24 (IM24) in June 2019, the Secretariat was requested to develop an East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML for consideration by COBSEA IM25. This decision is available in Annex III to the IM24 report: <https://www.sea-circular.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/COBSEA-IGM-24-Report-adopted.pdf>.

The GPML also organises online courses and webinars relating to marine plastics such as the GPML Webinar on Innovation and Technology Solution for Marine Litter Prevention in March 2019 (available: <https://vimeo.com/328741879>) and the Massive Open Online Course on Marine Litter (available: <https://www.ou.nl/-/unenvironment-mooc-marine-litter>).

From 9–13 October 2019, the GPML and COBSEA organised the workshop ‘Training of Trainers on Monitoring and Assessment of Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics’ in Bali, Indonesia. A ‘Manual-Training the Trainers on Monitoring and Assessment of Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics’ was published in September 2019. In October 2019, the report of the workshop was also published. Both are available online: <https://www.unenvironment.org/cobsea/resources>.

3.4 UNEP: Clean Seas

Summary of role: *Clean Seas is a campaign launched by UNEP with the aim of engaging governments, the general public and the private sector on pollution from marine plastic and develop education and provide outreach on this topic.*

Summary of work status: *A number of online and in-person training courses*

Keywords/research fields: *UN Environment Programme; UNEP; Clean Seas; marine litter; establishment; objectives; work in the region; online course*

3.4.1 Establishment

Clean Seas is a campaign launched by UNEP in February 2017 with the aim of engaging governments, the general public and the private sector in the fight against marine plastic pollution. Further information is available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25398/Clean%20Seas%20Campaign%20on%20marine%20litter.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>.

3.4.2 Objectives

This campaign focuses on:

- Establishing national and regional marine litter action plans;
- Educating and engaging citizens – resources are available on the Clean Seas website: <https://www.CleanSeas.org/resources>;
- Collaborating with governments and the private sector; and
- Replicating and scaling up efforts around the world.

3.4.3 Work in the region

Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand take part in this campaign, with 57 countries currently participating globally.

One of the recent outcomes of this initiative is the ‘Massive Open Online Course on Marine Litter’ created by UNEP and the Open Universiteit of the Netherlands, available at: <https://www.ou.nl/-/unenvironment-mooc-marine-litter>. This was organised with support from the GPA, Clean Seas and GPML. Two online courses have been coordinated to date, in 2015 and 2019 respectively.

In addition, Japan and UNEP also announced in March 2019 that they will join in efforts to boost information and know-how to develop countermeasures against marine plastic litter in Southeast Asia. The project will develop a simulation model for the movement of plastic leakage into and within the oceans and establish monitoring programmes to determine leakage hotspots along the Mekong River

(as well as the Ganges River in India). See: <https://www.cleansseas.org/impact/japan-and-un-environment-announce-new-cooperation-boost-knowledge-marine-litter-southeast>.