

4. INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES THAT DIRECTLY SUPPORT THE WORK OF UNEA AND UNEP ON MARINE PLASTICS

4.1 Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA)

Summary of role: *The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA) is an intergovernmental mechanism established in 1995 to respond to land-based sources of pollution of the marine environment and includes plastics waste in its scope. It is a voluntary and non-binding programme. An Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR) had been organized every 5 years since 2001 to review implementation of the GPA*

Summary work status: *The last IGR, in 2018, resulted in a general agreement on continuing work on enhancing the mainstreaming of the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems, especially from the environmental threats caused by increased nutrients, wastewater, and marine litter and microplastics. The future of the GPA was also discussed and referred to UNEA-4. However, the latter did not make a decision on this. The future of the work of this GPA is therefore unclear.*

Keywords/research fields: *Function and Mandate; Status of work; 2012 Manila Declaration on Furthering Implementation of the GPA*

4.1.1 Function and mandate

The GPA was created as an intergovernmental mechanism to respond to land-based sources of marine pollution. It aims at preventing the degradation of the marine environment from land-based activities by facilitating the realization of the duty of states to preserve and protect the marine environment. It was adopted by 108 governments, and the European Commission at an intergovernmental conference convened in Washington D.C. in 1995. It is designed to assist states in taking actions individually or jointly within their respective policies, priorities and resources, that will lead to the prevention, reduction, control and/or elimination of the degradation of the marine environment, as well as to its recovery from the impacts of land-based activities. (GPA, I.B.3) Available: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/1995-gpa.pdf>.

From an international law perspective, the GPA is a mechanism developed to implement UNCLOS (in particular Articles 207 and 213 on pollution from land-based sources) as well as other relevant treaties. In addition to UNCLOS, it specifically refers to the London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention and its Protocol), the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Regional Seas conventions and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). (GPA, I.C.4-7)

With respect to contaminants, the GPA specifically identifies litter (including plastic litter) as one of eight contaminants that characterise a problem and need management measures. The other seven are: sewage, POPs, radioactive substances, heavy metals, oils (hydrocarbons), nutrients and sediment mobilization. Plastic is also mentioned in the context of sewage. In the specific context of litter, sources of marine litter are identified as including land-based and sea-based sources. Importantly, the GPA already refers to floatable litter which is known to travel considerable distances with regional and sometimes broader implications, as well as resin pellets used as industrial feedstock which circulate and deposit on oceanic scales. Finally, it also highlights that the burning of litter containing plastics may generate significant quantities of POPs, metals and hydrocarbons which can reach the marine and coastal environment. (GPA, H.142-143)

4.1.2 Method and status of work

The GPA emphasises the critical role of regional and sub-regional conventions, programmes, arrangements and their institutional mechanisms for successful actions to protect the marine environment from land-based activities. (GPA, III.21-35)

An Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR) has been organized every 5 years since 2001 and it also involves IGOs and non-state stakeholders such as NGOs. The 2012 Manila Declaration on Furthering Implementation of the GPA was adopted ahead of the 3rd IGR (IGR 3) and is included in the meeting report where work on plastic litter is a particular area of concern and focus. Reports of the meetings are available online at: <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/addressing-land-based-pollution/governing-global-programme>.

The last IGR (IGR 4) was held in Bali in November 2018. The report is short as is the Bali Declaration adopted at the end of the meeting. This Declaration indicates a general agreement on continuing work on enhancing the mainstreaming of the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems, especially from the environmental threats caused by increased nutrients, wastewater, and marine litter and microplastics. It does not include other detail and refers to UNEA-4. For further details on the outcome of UNEA-4, refer to [Part 1, Section 3.2.2.4](#) above. IGR 4 and the Bali Declaration are available online at: <https://papersmart.unon.org/igr-meeting/sites/default/files/english.pdf>.

4.1.3 2012 Manila Declaration on Furthering Implementation of the GPA

The Manila Declaration on Furthering Implementation of the GPA (2012 Manila Declaration) was adopted by 65 governments and the European Commission ahead of IGR 3. It identifies marine litter as a priority source category for action for 2012–2016 and triggered the development of the GPML. The Declaration also recognises the important role of regional cooperation, in particular the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, to implement the GPA and calls for strengthening and promoting the existing Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to further implement the GPA [Manila Declaration, p2]. For further details on the GPML, refer to [Part 1, Section 3.3.3](#) above. The 2012 Manila Declaration is available online at: <http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/12347/ManillaDeclarationREV.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.