11.5 World Health Organisation (WHO)

Summary of role: World Health Organisation (WHO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations in charge of international public health. Its objective is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people.

Summary of recommendations and work status: WHO has highlighted pollution from marine plastics and participated in the UN call to "beat plastic pollution" on 2018 World Environment Day. In August 2019, WHO released research results on "Microplastics in drinking water" on the level of microplastics in drinking water

Keywords/research fields: World Health Organisation; WHO; background and aim; public health; marine plastic; beat plastic pollution; microplastics in drinking water

11.5.1 Background and aim

The World Health Organisation (WHO) was established in 1948 and is based in Geneva. The regional office of WHO for Southeast Asia is in Indonesia. However, only Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Timor-Leste are a WHO country.

11.5.2 Work

While the Indonesian regional office has not published any work with a particular focus on the impact of marine plastics and plastic pollution in general, the WHO at the global level has highlighted pollution from marine plastics and participated in the UN call to 'beat plastic pollution' on 2018 World Environment Day.

In August 2019, the WHO released a research paper on 'Microplastics in drinking water'. The research concluded that with the current level of microplastics, drinking water does not yet pose any significant risk to human health. However, it does recognize limitations in the evidence for drawing a firm conclusion. Available: https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/microplastics-in-drinking-water/en/.

These conclusions are challenged by more recent reports which highlight the numerous sources of exposure of humans to plastics and microplastics, including airborne pollution.