

UPCOMING UN TREATY ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

BUSINESS BRIEF

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Introduction

On 2 March 2022, at the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), member states adopted a resolution: [End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument](#). This resolution requests that the the UNEP Executive Director convenes an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. This summary suggests three key areas where business can take action in the context of this new resolution.

The current policy landscape around plastic pollution is very diverse, making it complex for multinational companies to navigate the regulatory frameworks and comply with the different rules (e.g., different definitions and product standards, certification, labeling, producer responsibility, waste management legislation etc.). This resolution presents an opportunity to develop a consistent and enabling regulatory framework that supports companies' commitments, strategies and investments toward a circular economy for plastics.

Negotiations will start in the second half of 2022, with the ambition of completing the work by the end of 2024. UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen, said that a UN Treaty on plastic pollution would be the "most significant environmental decision since Paris."

The challenge is significant as 300 million tons of plastic waste are produced every year, almost the entire weight of the human population.

Only 9% of today's plastic waste is recycled, and 11 million tons of plastics end up in the ocean every year; that is one garbage truck of plastic dumped into our oceans every minute.

Considering the global treaty will address the plastic life cycle (including microplastics), the measures countries will negotiate will impact companies that produce plastic, use plastic, manage plastic waste and recycle plastic — to ensure plastic waste stays out of the environment.

Specifically, there are three key areas where businesses can contribute to ending plastic pollution:

- **Take part in the negotiations**
WBCSD is building a dedicated working group that will serve as a discussion platform for policymakers and companies to road-test proposed measures and analyze data gaps.
- **Measure, report and disclose**
This includes collaborating with policymakers to introduce a mechanism to report and disclose companies' data, contributions and progress on plastics sustainability and circularity.
- **Ensure packaging sustainability**
Companies must reduce the environmental impact of packaging. WBCSD's SPHERE framework can help companies make informed decisions and choose the most sustainable packaging for their needs.



Summary of the resolution

The UN Treaty will align countries under a common goal and approach to end plastic pollution. It will include binding and voluntary approaches and address the full life cycle of plastics taking into account national circumstances and capabilities.

The implementation of the agreement will affect companies along the entire plastics value chain as the INC will discuss measures, rules, standards and requirements for all stages in the plastics life cycle. This includes questions related to the reduction of problematic and avoidable plastic products; design of essential plastic products; technical requirements for recycling and waste management; and sustainable plastic waste management (reuse, repair, recycling) etc.

The INC will also define the nature of the global agreement, for example, encompassing globally harmonized standards versus what should be left at the discretion of the national level. There will be specific obligations for countries that will trickle down from the global to the national and corporate level – starting with the development of national action plans and reporting.

The resolution also requests that the Executive Director convenes a pre-INC meeting during the first half of 2022 (potentially in May) to prepare the work; stresses the need to ensure broad participation with all relevant stakeholders, including business; and asks the Executive Director to convene a forum (in the second half of 2022) to exchange information and activities related to plastic pollution.

Table: Provisions and considerations for the INC during the negotiations over the next two years

PROVISIONS TO INCLUDE IN THE GLOBAL INSTRUMENT	OTHER ELEMENTS FOR THE INC TO CONSIDER IN ITS DELIBERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives of the instrument • Promotion of sustainable production and consumption of plastics, including product design, and environmentally sound waste management thorough resource efficiency and circular economy approaches • Development, implementation, updating of national action plans reflecting country-driven approaches • National reporting • Progress assessment • Provision of scientific and socio-economic assessments • Encouragement of action by all stakeholders, including the private sector • Initiation of a multi-stakeholder action agenda • Specification of arrangements for capacity building and technical assistance, technology transfer, and financial assistance • Promotion of research and development of sustainable, affordable, innovative, and cost-effective approaches • Compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligations, measures, and voluntary approaches in supporting the achievements of the objectives of the instrument • Need for financial mechanisms with option for a dedicated multilateral fund • Flexibility that some provisions could allow countries discretion in implementation of their commitments taking into account the national circumstances • Lessons learned from informal and cooperative sectors • The possibility of a mechanism to provide policy-relevant scientific and socio-economic information and assessment related to plastic pollution • Any other aspects that the intergovernmental negotiating committee may consider relevant

How business can take action

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGOTIATIONS

Just over two years to negotiate on such a complex issue is a very short length of time. The engagement of the private sector in the negotiations is therefore key to ensure that the proposed measures are adequate across the plastics value chain, ensure future implementation, drive innovation and encourage investment in sustainable solutions, business models and technologies. The negotiations provide an opportunity to mobilize the business community and WBCSD is committed to offer a platform for discussions between policymakers and companies to road-test proposed measures and analyze data gaps. WBCSD members can join our dedicated working group to have their voices heard. This working group will also liaise with WBCSD partners such as the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, WWF, EMF, Business for Nature and other initiatives.

MEASURE, REPORT, DISCLOSE

A new global agreement also offers an opportunity for collaboration between business and policymakers to introduce a mechanism to report and disclose companies' data, contribution and progress. An agreed set of measurement and reporting metrics should be applied consistently across geographies and industries—from the national to the corporate scale with indicators, calculation methods and terminology across the plastics value chain, in order to develop standardized baselines, measurement and reporting.

WBCSD anticipates an active role for the private sector to support the national efforts in reaching the goals the new global agreement will set. As part of its [Sustainable Plastics and Packaging Value Chains project](#), WBCSD is keen to support the development of a new global framework based on corporate ambition, targets and progress regarding plastics sustainability and circularity.

ENSURE PACKAGING SUSTAINABILITY

Around 40% of the global plastics produced is for packaging application. Together with other single-use plastic items, this is what is most littered and visible on our beaches, in rivers and oceans. Companies are beginning to ensure their packaging is sustainable and does not end up in the environment – moving from one packaging material to another. But are we all aligned on the definition of packaging sustainability?

Since the start of our [Sustainable Plastics and Packaging Value Chains project](#) in early 2021, our members have defined sustainability in packaging as “maximum circularity and minimum environmental footprint, while avoiding the presence of harmful substances.” We have established core principles behind packaging sustainability and we will be shortly releasing our 'SPHERE' framework - Sustainability in Packaging Holistic Evaluation for Decision-Making. SPHERE offers a unique approach for decision-making to choose the most sustainable option for the specific packaging need and delivery system at hand, helping companies to reduce their packaging environmental impact.

CONTACT

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ABOUT THE WORLD BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WBCSD)

WBCSD is the premier global, CEO-led community of over 200 of the world's leading sustainable businesses working collectively to accelerate the system transformations needed for a net zero, nature positive and more equitable future.

We do this by engaging executives and sustainability leaders from business and elsewhere to share practical insights on the obstacles and opportunities we currently face in tackling the integrated climate, nature and inequality sustainability challenge; by co-developing "how-to" CEO-guides from these insights; by providing science-based target guidance including standards and protocols; and by developing tools and platforms to help leading businesses in sustainability drive integrated actions to tackle climate, nature and inequality challenges across sectors and geographical regions.

Our member companies come from all business sectors and all major economies, representing a combined revenue of more than USD \$8.5 trillion and 19 million employees. Our global network of almost 70 national business councils gives our members unparalleled reach across the globe. Since 1995, WBCSD has been uniquely positioned to work with member companies along and across value chains to deliver impactful business solutions to the most challenging sustainability issues. Together, we are the leading voice of business for sustainability, united by our vision of creating a world in which 9+ billion people are living well, within planetary boundaries, by mid-century.

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