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**Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the  
Implementation of the Global Programme of Action  
for the Protection of the Marine Environment  
from Land-based Activities**

**Fifth session**

Online, 15 February 2022

**Report of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Review  
Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of  
Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from  
Land-based Activities**

**Introduction**

1. The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities was held online on 15 February 2022. The session was convened in accordance with a decision taken by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) at its 156th meeting, on 30 November 2021.

**I. Opening of the session**

2. The meeting was opened at 2.15 p.m. (UTC + 3) on Tuesday, 15 February 2022 by Ms. Leticia Carvalho, Principal Coordinator of the Marine and Freshwater Branch of the Ecosystems Division of UNEP.

3. Ms. Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division, delivered welcoming remarks on behalf of Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP. Ms. Tessa Goverse, Coordinator of the Global Programme of Action, delivered a statement in which she described the progress made in meeting the commitments outlined in the Bali Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities,<sup>1</sup> adopted at the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting.

4. In her opening remarks, Ms. Gardner welcomed participants joining the online meeting from around the world. She recalled that the Global Programme of Action, adopted at an intergovernmental meeting held in November 1995 in Washington, D.C.,<sup>2</sup> aimed to assist States to fulfil their duty to preserve the marine environment and protect it from the effects of land-based activities. The Programme was the only global initiative that directly addressed the connectivity between terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. At the third session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in Manila in January 2012, Governments had decided that UNEP, through a multi-stakeholder approach, should focus on addressing nutrients, marine litter and wastewater as the three priority source categories of pollution. Preventing marine pollution from land-based activities was

<sup>1</sup> UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/5, annex.

<sup>2</sup> See A/51/116, annex II.

closely connected to the triple planetary crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change, action on which formed the core of the strategy of UNEP in coming years.

5. Coastal and marine ecosystems provided key environmental services for economies and societies. Consequently, pollution and damage to those ecosystems had a detrimental impact not only on the environment but also on the income of communities that depended on marine services, including those in the fishing, tourism and transportation industries. Marine pollution caused degradation of environmental functions, resulting in loss of biodiversity, including through such agents as nitrogen in agricultural run-off, marine litter, plastics and microplastics. The challenge of preserving coastal and marine ecosystems was exacerbated by emerging pollutants, such as pharmaceuticals and toxic substances; by over-enrichment by nutrients, causing eutrophication and dead zones in some coastal areas; and by ocean acidification resulting from climate change.

6. The global call for action and increased recognition of the connections between the issues were, however, encouraging. It was important, therefore, for all stakeholders to consider the future of the Global Programme of Action and its intergovernmental review mechanism, particularly in the context of the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, to be held from 28 February to 2 March 2022, which would consider a number of related issues, including marine litter and plastic pollution, as well as sustainable nitrogen management.

7. Ms. Goverse, in her opening statement, said that it was a privilege and honour for her, as the incoming coordinator of the Global Programme of Action, to address delegations attending the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting. Land-based sources of pollution, including urban, industrial and agricultural wastes, caused serious threats to ocean sustainability and development worldwide. Addressing land-based pollution holistically connected to several of the Sustainable Development Goals, notably those relating to food security, health, sustainable resource use, coastal resilience, and jobs and income. UNEP, which had been established at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, had started a Regional Seas Programme in 1974 to promote cooperation for clean and healthy seas. To date, more than 143 nations had signed 18 regional seas conventions and action plans for the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment, many containing elements based on the work of the Global Programme of Action.

8. Pursuant to the mandate that had emerged from the third session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, UNEP had focused its resources on engaging strategically with Governments and other relevant stakeholders to address the three priority source categories of pollution through three global voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships: the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the Global Wastewater Initiative. At the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in Bali, Indonesia, in 2018, representatives had adopted the Bali Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, in which it had been proposed that the future of the Global Programme of Action should be based on the function, form and implications of the Programme, including legal, budgetary and organizational aspects. The UNEP secretariat had accordingly prepared an analysis of options and alternatives for the overall Programme and its coordinating mechanism, which had been presented to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP for further consideration. On 30 November 2021, the Committee had endorsed the proposed way forward and had recommended the endorsement by the Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the draft decision before the current meeting. The guidance of Member States during the process had been invaluable.

## II. Organizational matters

9. Before the agenda item was broached, the representative of the secretariat said that 67 Member States and the European Union had registered for the meeting.

10. Mr. Stadler Trengove, the legal adviser of UNEP, recalled that the Washington Declaration and the Global Programme of Action had been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/189 of December 1996. Regarding the intergovernmental review process, the Governing Council of UNEP, in decision 21/10 of February 2001, had requested the Executive Director to organize the first intergovernmental review meeting on the status of implementation of the Global Programme of Action. At its first session, held in Montreal in November 2001, the Intergovernmental Review Meeting had agreed that it would adhere to the rules of procedure of the Governing Council of UNEP, *mutatis mutandis*. As the Environment Assembly was the successor of the Governing Council, its rules of procedure therefore applied to the Intergovernmental Review Meeting. As an intergovernmental

process under the Environment Assembly, a body of universal membership, the Intergovernmental Review Meeting was therefore also a body of universal membership.

11. Regarding the quorum of the meeting, rule 32 of the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly stipulated that at least one third of members be present for a meeting to proceed and that a majority of members be present for any decision to be taken. As the Environment Assembly consisted of 193 Member States, the presence of 65 members was therefore required for an Intergovernmental Review Meeting to begin, and 97 members must be present for a decision to be taken. However, at the third session of the Meeting, where decisions had been adopted, 65 members had been present. Therefore, the adoption of a decision during the present meeting would be consistent with the previous practice of the Meeting.

#### **A. Election of officers**

12. The following officers were elected, by acclamation, to the Bureau:

Chair:	Mr. Axel Borchmann (Germany)
Vice-chairs:	Mr. Bope Bope Lapwong (Democratic Republic of the Congo)
	Mr. Jafar Barmaki (Iran (Islamic Republic of))
	Mr. Vladimir Lenev (Russian Federation)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Barmaki agreed to serve as rapporteur.

#### **B. Adoption of the agenda**

13. The following agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/GPA/IGR.5/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Organizational matters:
  - (a) Election of officers;
  - (b) Adoption of the agenda;
  - (c) Organization of work.
3. Review of the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities at the international, regional and national levels during the period 2019–2021.
4. Draft decision on the intergovernmental review mechanism of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities.
5. Closure of the session.

#### **C. Organization of work**

14. The Intergovernmental Review Meeting agreed to follow the programme of work set out in the annotated agenda (UNEP/GPA/IGR.5/1/Add.1).

#### **D. Attendance**

15. Representatives of the following States participated in the session: Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

16. An observer for the European Union also participated.

17. The following United Nations programmes, specialized agencies and other entities, as well as secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, were represented: Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the

Mediterranean, Caribbean Environment Programme, Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, secretariat of the Mediterranean Action Plan, Northwest Pacific Action Plan, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, World Bank Group.

18. The following intergovernmental organization was represented: European Commission.

19. Representatives of the following non-governmental, academic, private-sector and other entities also attended: Al-Mortaga Foundation for Development, Comparatively for Tanzania Elites Community Organizers, Emirates Environmental Group, Environment and Social Development Organization, India Water Foundation, International Centre for Environmental Education and Community Development, International Movement for Advancement of Education Culture Social and Economic Development, Technologies for Economic Development, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Welfare Togo, World Plastics Council.

20. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: European Commission.

21. The Global Environment Facility was also represented at the meeting.

### **III. Review of the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities at the international, regional and national levels during the period 2019–2021**

22. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the note by the secretariat on progress in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities at the international, regional and national levels during the period 2019–2021 (UNEP/GPA/IGR.5/2).

23. Ms. Goverse, delivering a presentation on the matter, said that the Global Programme of Action aimed to tackle land-based sources of pollution using a source-to-sea approach. The three voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships addressing the priority source categories of pollution – the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the Global Wastewater Initiative – had steadily grown during the reporting period and currently brought together over 700 partners from around the globe. The Global Programme of Action had delivered webinars, online courses and training on nutrients, marine litter and wastewater to thousands of participants.

24. Summarizing progress in the three areas, she said that the United Nations Environment Assembly, at its fourth session, had adopted a resolution on sustainable nitrogen management. Activities conducted that supported its implementation included a project funded by the Global Environment Facility on the establishment of an international nitrogen management system; the establishment of a nitrogen working group, in which 45 countries were participating; the development of a global model for total nitrogen, total phosphorus and dissolved silica, to contribute to the calculation of the Index for Coastal Eutrophication Potential and to the realization of indicator 14.1.1 (a) of Sustainable Development Goal 14; the production of a chapter on nitrogen pollution and related countermeasures for the UNEP publication *Frontiers 2018/2019: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*; and the launch, in Colombo in October 2019, of a United Nations global campaign on sustainable nitrogen management.

25. With regard to marine litter and plastic pollution, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter had developed a number of action tracks. They included support for the development of national action plans on marine litter and plastic pollution in eight countries, augmented by the development of a national source inventories methodology for marine litter and plastic pollution to guide and inform the design and implementation of action plans; support for the development of regional action plans; dissemination of knowledge products to inform decision-making and support evidence-based action, including an assessment published by UNEP entitled *From Pollution to Solution: A Global Assessment of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution*; education initiatives, including a massive open online course and training of trainers on the monitoring and assessment of marine litter and microplastics; the continuation of the “Clean Seas” campaign and related activities; and online initiatives, including the launch of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter digital platform and the Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution Ontology Community of Practice, whose purpose was to create a consistent, machine-readable system for the classification of marine litter and to advance the harmonization of related terminology.

26. With regard to wastewater, activities included the launch of the *Sanitation and Wastewater Atlas of Africa* in 2021; the re-release of the report entitled *Sanitation, Wastewater Management and Sustainability: From Waste Disposal to Resource Recovery* on World Water Day 2021; the implementation of demonstration projects on tackling wastewater pollution, including in Kenya, Malaysia and the United Republic of Tanzania; and online education initiatives, including a massive open online course and webinars on wastewater and nutrient management.

#### **IV. Draft decision on the intergovernmental review mechanism of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities**

27. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a note by the secretariat presenting a draft decision on the intergovernmental review mechanism of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (UNEP/GPA/IGR.5/3).

28. A representative of the secretariat recalled that in 2018, at the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, the secretariat had been requested to present an analysis of options and alternatives for the Global Programme of Action and its coordinating mechanism. An options paper had been presented to the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP in February 2019, and the matter had been further considered by the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP during its fourth meeting, in March 2019. Guidance and input from Member States and from informal consultations held in 2019 and 2020 had served as the basis for the draft decision prepared by the secretariat, which had been presented to the subcommittee for its consideration during the meeting held on 25 November 2021. The current session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting had been convened in accordance with a decision of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 30 November 2021 to recommend the draft decision for endorsement by the Meeting.

29. A representative of the secretariat read aloud the text of the draft decision as presented on screen.

30. The Chair invited the Meeting to consider and adopt the draft decision.

31. During the ensuing discussion, two representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested clarification regarding whether quorum had been met for the purpose of adopting the decision.

32. A representative of the secretariat reiterated that 67 Member States and one intergovernmental organization had registered for the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting. Mr. Trengove reiterated that the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, which was a body of universal membership. He noted that, at the first session of the Meeting, 98 member States had been present; at the second session, 104; and at the third session, where decisions had been adopted, 65 members had been present.

33. The Chair noted that existing practice was being followed in adopting the decision.

34. The Meeting adopted the decision.

35. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives lauded the valuable work done since the creation of the Global Programme of Action, including in the context of its three global partnerships. Several pledged to continue to act to protect the marine environment from land-based pollution, and some noted that, without global effort, work done by individual States would remain ineffective. In that regard, one representative said that, although countries were making valiant efforts, that was not enough. He highlighted the need for financial support through international cooperation in order to achieve meaningful progress. One representative said that UNEP should continue to support and coordinate local efforts to combat marine pollution and suggested that a global coordination centre be established in Bali for that purpose. Many representatives described local efforts made to address the problem through the enactment of national legislation and the implementation of national and regional action plans and policies, including initiatives targeting single-use plastic products. One representative said that the decision adopted by the Meeting offered a clear and strong path forward for the continuation of work. The Global Programme of Action had provided a robust model to assist countries in developing more tailored action plans to curtail pollution from land-based activities and to institutionalize sectoral management, and she strongly encouraged the continuation of cross-sectoral engagement. One representative said that, with the shipwreck of the X-Press Pearl, her country had experienced one of the worst marine disasters in history, as a result of which microplastic pollution

would plague the region's waters for years. A number of representatives expressed full support for all measures taken to combat marine plastic and microplastic pollution, including through the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee that might be called for at the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

## **V. Closure of the session**

36. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the meeting was declared closed at 4.30 p.m. (UTC + 3) on Tuesday, 15 February 2022.

## Annex

### **Decision 5/1. Intergovernmental review mechanism of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities**

#### **Decision 5/1. Intergovernmental review mechanism of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities**

1. *Recognizing* that maintaining a high-quality coastal and marine environment provides ecosystem functions and services in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development),
2. *Recalling* that the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities was created to counter the impact of land-based activities on the marine environment from nine source categories, and that the Global Programme of Action was adopted by 108 Governments and the European Commission at an intergovernmental conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1995,<sup>3</sup>
3. *Recalling also* that sessions of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the Global Programme of Action have been held in Montreal, Canada (2001), Beijing, China (2006), Manila, Philippines (2012) and Bali, Indonesia (2018), whereby Governments, with the participation of stakeholders, met to review the status of the implementation of the Global Programme of Action and to decide on the actions to be taken to strengthen the Programme and its implementation,
4. *Recalling further* the Bali Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities,<sup>4</sup> adopted at the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in Bali, Indonesia, on 31 October and 1 November 2018, in which it was agreed to work on the function, form and implications (including legal, budgetary and organizational) of the Global Programme of Action, including the future of the intergovernmental review process and the work coordinated by the Coordination Office of the Global Programme of Action,
5. *Noting with appreciation* the regional consultations on the future of the Global Programme of Action conducted by the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme in 2019 and 2020, as well as the related briefings provided by the secretariat to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme,
6. *Noting with appreciation also* that the United Nations Environment Programme has hosted the Coordination Office of the Global Programme of Action since its establishment, and the work of the Office in preventing marine pollution from land-based sources at the global level through demonstration projects, policy recommendations, research, capacity-building and awareness-raising activities, as well as the valuable role of its three global partnerships, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management and the Global Wastewater Initiative, for which the Coordination Office provides secretariat functions,
7. *Recognizing* that the general objectives and activities of the Global Programme of Action form part of the medium-term strategy 2022–2025<sup>5</sup> and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023<sup>6</sup> of the United Nations Environment Programme and remain relevant to its mission and to a number of resolutions adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, namely:
  - (a) Environment Assembly resolution 1/6 on marine plastic debris and microplastics;
  - (b) Environment Assembly resolution 2/10 on oceans and seas;
  - (c) Environment Assembly resolution 2/11 on marine plastic litter and microplastics;

<sup>3</sup> See A/51/116, annex II.

<sup>4</sup> UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/5, annex.

<sup>5</sup> UNEP/EA.5/3/Rev.1.

<sup>6</sup> UNEP/EA.5/3/Add.1.

- (d) Environment Assembly resolution 2/12 on sustainable coral reefs management;
- (e) Environment Assembly resolution 3/4 on environment and health;
- (f) Environment Assembly resolution 3/6 on managing soil pollution to achieve sustainable development;
- (g) Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics;
- (h) Environment Assembly resolution 3/8 on preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally;
- (i) Environment Assembly resolution 3/10 on addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems;
- (j) Environment Assembly resolution 4/6 on marine plastic litter and microplastics;
- (k) Environment Assembly resolution 4/11 on protection of the marine environment from land-based activities;
- (l) Environment Assembly resolution 4/14 on sustainable nitrogen management;
- (m) Environment Assembly resolution 4/21 on the implementation plan “Towards a pollution-free planet”;

8. *Decides* to hold no further sessions of the periodic Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, recognizing that the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme can continue to provide guidance on priorities and actions to address marine pollution from land-based activities;

9. *Recognizes* the continued relevance and valuable role of the Global Programme of Action and its three global partnerships, namely the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management and the Global Wastewater Initiative, in tackling land-based pollution and as tools that contribute to the implementation of relevant Sustainable Development Goal targets, in particular target 6.3, target 6.a and target 14.1, and calls upon all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system, other relevant regional and international organizations, the private sector, academia, civil society, non-governmental organizations, individuals and other relevant stakeholders to support the activities of the Global Programme of Action;

10. *Invites* the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, as appropriate and subject to the availability of resources, to continue to support the general objectives of the Global Programme of Action as well as its three partnerships for tackling land-based pollution within the framework of the programme of work and budget of the United Nations Environment Programme, and to maintain and strengthen the capacity of the Programme to support Member States in implementing and reporting on national, regional and global programmes to address land-based sources of marine pollution;

11. *Invites* the United Nations Environment Assembly to continue to review progress in the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources in the context of the implementation of the programme of work and budget of the United Nations Environment Programme and, where relevant, to consider the results of scientific assessments and reports on emerging issues that contribute to achieving high-quality coastal and marine environments, in line with the operational frameworks of the partnerships;

12. *Invites* the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session to take note of the present decision and to include it in its report to the General Assembly.