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Addressing marine plastic litter from ships – action plan adopted

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IMO pledges to further address the significant problem posed by plastics to the marine environment through a number of measures identified in an action plan.



The IMO Action Plan to address marine plastic litter from ships identifies a number of measures to reduce plastic litter in the marine environment.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has pledged to further address the significant problem posed by plastics to the marine environment, with the adoption of an action plan which aims to enhance existing regulations and introduce new supporting measures to reduce marine plastic litter from ships.

IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) adopted (on 26 October) the action plan, to contribute to the global solution for preventing marine plastic litter entering the oceans through ship based activities.

Discharging plastics into the sea is already prohibited under regulations for the prevention of pollution by garbage from ships in the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships ([MARPOL](#)), which also oblige governments to ensure adequate port reception facilities to receive ship waste. Under the London Convention and [Protocol](#) on the dumping of wastes at sea, only permitted materials can be dumped and this waste has to be fully assessed to ensure it does not contain harmful materials like plastic litter.

Recognizing that more needs to be done to address the environmental and health problems posed by marine plastic litter, IMO Member States meeting in the MEPC agreed actions to be completed by 2025, which relate to all ships, including fishing vessels. The action plan supports IMO's commitment to meeting the targets set

in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 14 ([SDG 14](#)) on the oceans.

Marine plastic litter can also pose dangers to shipping. For example, abandoned or lost fishing nets can become entangled in propellers and rudders.

IMO Action Plan to address marine plastic litter from ships

The Action Plan notes that marine plastic litter enters the marine environment as a result of a wide range of land- and sea-based activities. Both macroplastics (for example, large plastic items such as plastic bags, water bottles and fishing gear) and microplastics (small plastic particles generally five millimetres or less in size) persist in the marine environment and result in harmful effects on marine life and biodiversity, as well as negative impacts on human health. In addition, marine plastic litter negatively impacts on activities such as tourism, fisheries and shipping. This plastic material has the potential to be brought back into the economy by means of reuse or recycling. Studies demonstrate that despite the existing regulatory framework to prevent marine plastic litter from ships, discharges into the sea continue to occur.

The Action Plan provides IMO with a mechanism to identify specific outcomes, and actions to achieve these outcomes, in a way that is meaningful and measurable. The plan builds on existing policy and regulatory frameworks, and identifies opportunities to enhance these frameworks and introduce new supporting measures to address the issue of marine plastic litter from ships. The concrete measures and details will be further considered by MEPC 74.

Specific identified measures include:

- a proposed study on marine plastic litter from ships;
- looking into the availability and adequacy of port reception facilities;
- consideration of making marking of fishing gear mandatory, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO);
- promoting reporting the loss of fishing gear;
- facilitating the delivery of retrieved fishing gear to shore facilities;
- reviewing provisions related to the training of fishing vessel personnel and familiarization of seafarers to ensure awareness of the impact of marine plastic litter;
- consideration of the establishment of a compulsory mechanism to declare loss of containers at sea and identify number of losses
- enhancing public awareness; and
- strengthening international cooperation, in particular FAO and UN Environment.

IMO will continue to work with UN partners, including, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), through the Joint FAO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) Fishing and Related Matters; the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP);

the UN Environment-managed Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML); the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP); and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).

IMO Action plan to address marine plastic litter from ships

The action plan will be reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

Reduction of marine plastic litter generated from, and retrieved by, fishing vessels

Measures include:

- consider making the IMO ship identification number mandatory for fishing vessels over a certain size;
- consider making marking of fishing gear with the IMO Ship Identification Number mandatory, in cooperation with FAO;
- further investigate logging of the identification number for each item of fishing gear on board a fishing vessel;
- remind States to collect information on any discharge or accidental loss of fishing gear; and
- consider the development of best management practice to facilitate incentives for fishing vessels to retrieve derelict fishing gear and deliver it to port reception facilities, in collaboration with FAO.

Reduction of shipping's contribution to marine plastic litter

Measures include:

- review the application of placards, garbage management plans and garbage record-keeping in MARPOL Annex V;
- consider establishing compulsory mechanism to declare loss of containers and identify number of losses; and
- consider ways to communicate location of containers lost overboard.

Improvement of the effectiveness of port reception and facilities and treatment in reducing marine plastic litter

Measures include:

- consider the requirement for port reception facilities to provide for separate garbage collection for plastic waste from ships, including fishing gear to facilitate reuse or recycling;
- consider mechanisms to enhance the enforcement of MARPOL Annex V requirements for the delivery of garbage to reception facilities;
- consider the development of tools to support the implementation of cost frameworks associated with port reception facilities;
- encourage Member States to effectively implement their obligation to provide adequate facilities at ports

and terminals for the reception of garbage; and

- further consider the impact on Small Island Developing States and on remote locations such as polar regions when planning for the disposal of waste to land-based facilities.

Enhanced public awareness, education and seafarer training

Measures include:

- consider ways to promote the work of IMO to address marine plastic litter generated from ships;
- consider reviewing fishing vessel personnel training to ensure that all fishing vessel personnel, before being assigned any shipboard duties, receive basic training on marine environment awareness oriented on marine plastic litter including abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear; and
- consider amending the IMO model course on environmental awareness to specifically address marine plastic litter.

Improved understanding of the contribution of ships to marine plastic litter

Measures include:

- consider extending the reporting requirement MARPOL Annex V to include reporting data on discharge or accidental loss of fishing gear by the flag State to IMO;
- encourage Member States and international organizations that have conducted any scientific research related to marine litter to share the results of such research, including any information on the areas contaminated by marine litter from ships;
- conduct a study on marine plastic litter, including macro and microplastics, from all ships; and
- invite Member States and international organizations to undertake studies to better understand microplastics from ships.

Improved understanding of the regulatory framework associated with marine plastic litter from ships

- consider the development of a regulatory framework matrix for the purpose of a gap analysis.

Strengthened international cooperation

- make information available to the United Nations Environment Assembly ([UNEA](#)); and
- continue work with other United Nations bodies and agencies, in particular FAO and UN Environment, as well as with international fora, which are active in the matter of marine plastic litter from shipping, such as through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter ([GPML](#)).

Targeted technical cooperation and capacity-building

- address implementation issues related to the action plan to address marine plastic litter from ships in the context of IMO technical cooperation and capacity building activities; and
- consider the establishment of externally funded major projects under the auspices of IMO in support of

the action plan to address marine plastic litter from ships.



International Maritime Organization
(IMO) 4 Albert Embankment, London
SE1 7SR, United Kingdom

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