Title: Urgent Call for Tackling Marine Plastics and Promoting Circular Economy in Coastal Cities of the Asia-Pacific and SIDS

Date & Time

Tuesday 22 April 2025
17:15 to 18:30 (EET) (75 minutes)
Mode of meeting: Hybrid
Room: Meeting Room H (MR-H)

Co-organizers: The Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Government of Thailand, IUCN and UN-Habitat.

Background

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for approximately 60% of the world's marine plastic pollution, which has a severe impact on marine ecosystems, economies, and human health. It is estimated that 80 per cent of marine pollution originates on land, the most prevalent types being nutrient pollution and marine debris. Rapid urbanization, inadequate waste management, and reliance on single-use plastics have resulted in significant ecological and economic impacts, posing risks to marine life, coastal communities, and public health. This has made this region a critical focus for action. Proactive measures are essential to mitigate economic losses and protect biodiversity.

Coastal cities are both contributors to and victims of marine plastic pollution. The resulting pollution undermines the environmental quality of coastal regions, affecting tourism and the livelihoods of communities in these regions. Additionally, the accumulation of plastic debris can lead to drainage system blockage, and soil contamination, leading to increased vulnerability during natural disasters.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are disproportionately affected by marine plastic pollution due to their unique vulnerabilities. Due to limited resources and available land, SIDS face challenges in establishing effective waste management systems. For instance, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands have been found to contain an estimated 414 million pieces of plastic debris, weighing approximately 238 tonnes. Both SIDs and other coastal cities heavily rely on tourism and fisheries, and therefore degradation of coral reefs, beaches, etc., leads to significant economic losses and threatens food security.

The fisheries and tourism sectors in Fiji have been adversely affected by the accumulation of plastic debris on beaches, and an increase in operational costs due to dumped catch and net repairs. Every year, approximately 140,000 tonnes of solid waste are disposed of in Fiji, with tourism contributing significantly. The relatively low rate of recycling highlights the challenges in the waste management infrastructure. The National Sustainable Tourism Framework seeks to leverage Fiji's natural, cultural, physical, and reputational assets for resilience.

In 2019, it was estimated that the Philippines contributed to approximately 36% of the global plastic waste entering the ocean. Annually, an estimated 2.7 million metric tons of plastic waste is generated, and 20% of that leaks into the ocean. This level of pollution severely threatens the nation's rich marine ecosystem, leading to irreversible harm to coral reefs and various marine

species. The degradation of this biodiversity not only disrupts marine habitats but also endangers the livelihoods of communities that are dependent on fishing and tourism. Through initiatives like the Marine Plastics Project, the government is improving governance, and demonstrating best practices and innovative solutions.

Thailand is considered one of the contributors to global plastic pollution, with an estimated 336,000 tons of plastic waste entering the ocean annually. In response, the country has taken proactive steps, including the ban on single-use plastic bags and imports of plastic waste, and partnerships with organizations such as The Ocean Cleanup to deploy advanced cleanup technologies in major rivers.

This 81st Commission side event will be an opportunity to focus on coastal cities' challenges and how the existing stakeholders' eco-system could work hand in hand.

UN-Habitat and IUCN seeks to address marine plastic pollution through the following ambitious project:

- Promote plastic waste management strategies and include a marine plastics focus in National Development Plans and City Plans.
- Empowering community-driven solutions, such as coastal clean-up campaigns and localized recycling technologies, to address marine plastics at the source.
- Strengthening governments, local authorities, private sectors, and CSOs capacities through training, policy support, and funding to implement scalable solutions.

Coastal cities and SIDS can drive systemic change and play a pivotal role in reducing plastic leakage into the ocean, through enhanced cooperation, shared policies, and innovative waste management solutions. The objectives of the side event will be to foster dialogue, enhance regional knowledge sharing and strengthen governance's response, showcase innovative tools and methods, and promote sustainable marine plastic management through common guidelines and frameworks.

This event will bring together policymakers, urban planners, researchers, and development partners to explore learnings, best practices and innovative tools from Member States and partners' experiences.

Following opening remarks from senior delegates, a panel discussion will be held to share the best practices and lessons learnt. The panellists, from different backgrounds, will introduce innovative tools spanning urban sectors to address marine plastic pollution. The event will conclude with a Q&A session providing an opportunity for audience members to share perspectives and ask questions.

The event relates to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets, in particular:

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
SDG 11: Sustainable cities and Communities
SDG 12: Responsible consumption and Production
SDG 14: Life below Water
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Objectives

The key outcome is to share with a broader audience the urgency of action to tackle marine plastic pollution and promote a circular economy approach in coastal cities of the Asia-Pacific and SIDS.

The key objectives of the session are to:

1. **Encourage innovative approaches**- Promote plastic waste management and CE strategies and include marine plastics in National Development Plans and City Plans.
2. **Promote Regional and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration- Enhance** regional cooperation to tackle marine plastic pollution
3. **Exchange of Knowledge -** Showcase innovative tools and methods for sustainable marine plastic management

Key Event Outcomes

The event will encompass three main outcomes:

1. Raising awareness about marine plastic pollution and emphasizing the urgent need for action in coastal cities and SIDS.
2. Fostering stronger regional cooperation through best practices sharing and lessons learnt among these cities, including local actions and community engagement, and through the creation of a community of practice and the idea of a data sharing platform
3. Proposing the development of a regional framework with policies and guidelines to address the issue effectively.

Programme

Time	Agenda item
17:15-17:35	Welcome and Keynote/High-level impact presentation (15min)
17:35-18:05	Panel discussion (35 min)
18:05- 18:20	Q&A Session (15 min)
18:20-18:30	Summary & Closing remarks (10 min)

Information and Contact

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