



INC-4: Towards an ambitious Global Plastic Treaty

Recommendations for the fourth negotiation meeting of the UN Global Plastic Treaty

April 2024

The ongoing intergovernmental negotiations (INC) on the UN Global Plastic Treaty offer a unique opportunity to address the root causes of plastic pollution. Recognising the need for urgent and comprehensive action, the treaty must implement and enforce global rules over the full lifecycle of plastics. An international legally binding instrument, the treaty on plastics pollution, should ensure the appropriate use of standards and prioritise provisions that reduce plastic pollution, avoid regrettable substitutions, and harness the power of transparency.

To make progress at INC-4, with time running short for negotiations, we urge negotiators to urgently address the following priority issues and essential measures:

 PRIORITY ISSUES	 ESSENTIAL MEASURES
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reduce plastic production.2. Avoid regrettable substitutions.3. Harness the power of transparency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Support global rules in the treaty.2. Ensure appropriate use of standards.

By the end of INC-4, parties must agree on a mandate to develop a full treaty draft before INC-5 (November 2024), along with a mandate for official intersessional work on these priority areas.

The negotiations must be ambitious and transparent to achieve the goal of reducing plastic pollution. With concerted efforts and global cooperation, we can address the plastic pollution crisis and pave the way for a sustainable future.



Essential measures

1. Support global rules in the treaty

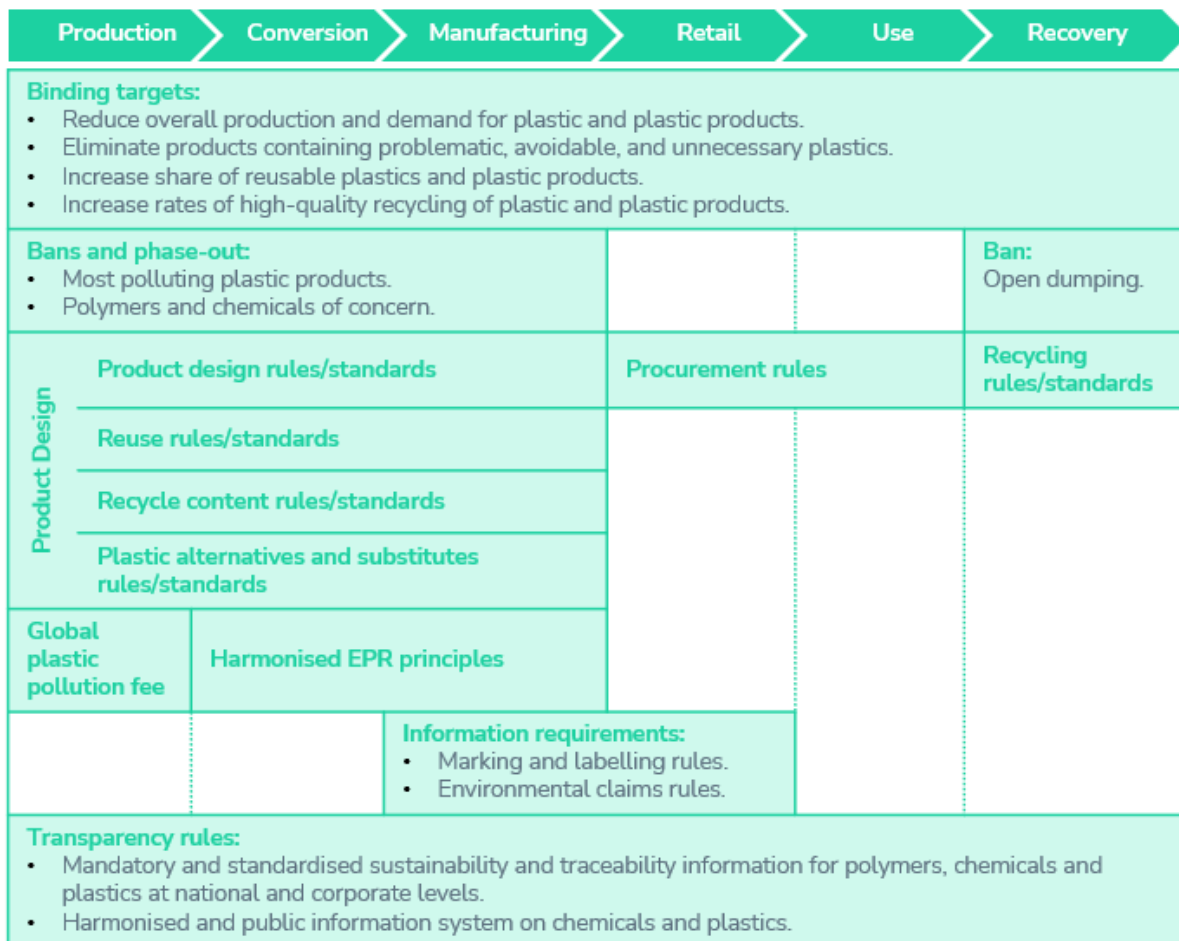
The unique strength of any global treaty is to hold all signatories to a common standard of action through global binding rules. Relying solely on voluntary initiatives driven by individual countries will not address the pervasive and transboundary issue of plastic pollution. Despite a 60% increase in national regulations targeting plastic pollution over the past five years, accompanied by various private sector voluntary efforts, oceanic plastic pollution has surged by over 50% during the same period.¹ A treaty based on voluntary and national initiatives would perpetuate this concerning trend.

The power of a treaty based on binding global rules is evidenced by the success of previous multilateral environmental agreements. The Montreal Protocol, a notable example, achieved a remarkable 98% reduction in ozone-depleting substances through the implementation of a global ban, rather than relying on voluntary measures.²

Recommendations

Without binding rules, mismanaged plastic volumes are predicted to double by 2040.¹ It is imperative that the treaty is firmly rooted in binding rules encompassing the entire lifecycle of plastics.

Figure 1. ECOS recommendations for essential global binding global rules to combat plastic pollution.



2. Ensure appropriate use of standards

Existing plastic-related standards have not systematically addressed the full plastics value chain. To date, standards are mainly used to determine material content in plastics, bio- or recycled plastics, their behaviour, and environmental effects under certain conditions.³ This is because standards are mostly voluntary instruments developed by industry for industry.

For standards to effectively support the goals of the treaty and to cover all aspects of the value chain, we need a governing body to define priorities for standard-setting and to provide clear roadmaps for future work. **Without a roadmap to ensure standards are being properly developed and used to comply with treaty provisions - standards on their own cannot solve the challenge of plastic pollution.**

Employing a governing body to oversee standardisation efforts is not a new approach for multilateral environmental agreements. Under the International Plant Protection Convention, a Commission of Phytosanitary Measures, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization, ensures the harmonization and implementation of standards. This body has developed 47 international standards and led capacity-building initiatives in 114 countries.⁴

Recommendations

To harness the potential of standards in realising the objectives of the treaty, we propose the establishment of a subsidiary body charged with overseeing standardisation efforts related to the treaty. The subsidiary body should be composed of experts in topics covered by the treaty and experts in standardisation, with balanced representation of all relevant stakeholders. The task force would:

- **Identify standardisation needs** and determine which standards need to be developed or revised to implement the provisions in the treaty.
- **Issue standardisation requests** for a relevant UN body (such as UNEP) with the essential requirements needed to fulfil the treaty provisions. As the entity responsible for ensuring standards comply with the treaty the task force will have the authority to accept or reject the standard.
- **Ensure standards are developed inclusively** with effective and balanced participation of all relevant societal stakeholders.
- **Build standardisation capacity among stakeholders** by working with parties and underrepresented stakeholders to build their capacity on standardisation.
- **Champion timely development and use of standards** by encouraging parties to work with their standards bodies and industries to support the processes for developing new standards, harmonising existing standards, and revising current standards.
- **Communicate progress transparently** in collaboration with the Plastic Treaty Secretariat to make information readily available (on a single website), regarding the standards used or under development to facilitate the implementation of the treaty.

Priority issues

1. Reduce plastic production

To meet the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement, global consumption of plastics per capita needs to be drastically reduced. Current projections predict that global plastic production will nearly triple from 2019 levels by 2060.⁽⁵⁾ Without changing course, by 2050, cumulative greenhouse gas emissions over the lifecycle of plastics, from production to incineration, could account for 10-13% of the total global carbon budget to stay within 1.5 degrees.⁶

A reduction of plastics is a non-negotiable - waste management systems are not at scale and lack capacity to deal with the current volumes of plastic waste. It is not realistic for them to catch up with the growth projections.

Recommendations

The treaty needs to incorporate binding global rules that will lead to the reduction of plastic production. To enable this, the instrument should include:

- A target to **phase down plastic production**, with emphasis on primary production.
- **Inclusion of feedstock and precursors in the scope of the treaty.**
- Provisions to **eliminate products containing problematic, avoidable, and unnecessary plastics**, including microplastics, single-use, and short-lived plastics.
- Rules to **ensure the systematic application of the waste hierarchy, circular economy principles, and life cycle assessment** when designing, producing, using, and disposing plastic products.
- Rules to **prioritise and establish reuse systems.**
- **Harmonised extended producer responsibility (EPR)** principles and clear rules for implementation.
- Rules and targets to **increase high quality recycling.**
- **Rules around environmental claims for plastic products**, i.e. recycled content.

2. Avoid regrettable substitutions

Alternative plastics and non-plastic substitutes have a specific role to play in reducing the accumulation of plastics in the environment, but they **are not silver bullets**. The treaty must ensure it does not cause negative trade-offs. Replacing single-use plastic cups with single-use bio-based plastic (BBP) or paper cups will pollute the environment on the same problematic scale.

Plastic alternatives such as BBP cannot be considered a 'greener' option to fossil-based plastics without proper environmental assessment. The environmental performance of bioplastics is often only slightly better than their fossil counterparts, and in some cases, they perform worse.⁷ Biodegradable and compostable plastics often pose health and environmental risks as they contain the same hazardous additives as conventional plastics. Approximately 40% of bio-based plastics are not biodegradable and many types of bio-based plastics are also not recyclable.⁸ Non-plastic substitutes, such as paper, can also be extremely harmful to the terrestrial, fresh, and marine environment, as well as human health and climate change. Especially when used for single-use or short-lived applications.⁹

Recommendations

The treaty needs to incorporate binding rules on the sustainable use of alternative plastics and non-plastic substitutes, including:

- Rules to prevent a switch from single-use plastics to single-use alternative plastics or non-plastic substitutes.

- Rules and guidance that implement the waste hierarchy, circular economy principles, and comparative life cycle assessments when considering alternative plastics or non-plastic substitutes.
- Rules around environmental claims on alternative plastics, e.g. biobased or biodegradable and non-plastic substitutes, e.g. carbon neutral.

3. Harness the power of transparency

The transparent exchange of information drives positive action and should lie at the core of any effective regulatory tool. CPD found that *“Just 38% of suppliers responding to CDP for the first time have emissions reductions targets. By the time they respond for the third time, some 69% of companies have set emission reduction goals”*.¹⁰

Disclosing information on a regular basis allows the discloser to understand risks, opportunities, dependencies, and impacts and creates accountability to civil society, regulators, and investors. **To achieve the type of business engagement, policy efficacy, and accurate monitoring required to attain treaty objectives, the treaty must implement a mandatory and robust disclosure mechanism.**

Recommendations

The treaty needs to incorporate binding rules on transparency for all relevant stakeholders, including signatories and large corporations. To enable this, the instrument should consider the following:

- Mandatory **standardised reporting requirements** for chemicals, plastic materials, and plastic products throughout their lifecycle.
- **Harmonised and public information system** on chemicals and plastics.
- **Establish a multistakeholder science-policy subsidiary body** to ensure a two-way science and policy interaction in policy- and decision-making for implementing and evaluating the treaty.
- Establish an **accountability mechanism**.

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