

## Plastic Pollution: Biodiversity Loss

On 28 October, 2021 Global CEOs from the **Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty** called on governments to deliver an ambitious treaty to end plastic pollution. This is a group of businesses and financial institutions which support the development of an ambitious, effective and legally binding UN treaty to end plastic pollution. The coalition is convened by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the WWF.

At the same time, over 190 countries and 23,000 attendees had gathered in Cali, Colombia, for the 16th Conference of the Parties on the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) - seeking to agree decisive measures for the protection of biodiversity. Marine plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980, affecting at least 267 animal species, including 86% of marine turtles, 44% of seabirds and 43% of marine mammals. The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List**, as of 2023, assesses over 150,000 animal species, many classified as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable - all at risk of extinction. Scientists estimate that the current rate of extinction is 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the natural background rate.



<https://pixabay.com/images/search/turtles%20marines%20pollution/>



<https://www.shutterstock.com/search/seabird-plastic>

Further, microplastics, tiny plastic particles up to five millimeters in diameter, are a growing threat to planetary health. Marine plastic litter breaking down, run-off from plumbing, leakage from production facilities and other sources, can lead to microplastics entering the oceans and atmosphere. Removing these plastics is difficult and costly, and almost impossible with regards to microplastics in the deep ocean. The OECDs Global Plastics Outlook projects leakage of

microplastics to continue to increase to 2060 in a scenario where no new policy measures are taken.

In March 2022, at the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), a historic resolution was adopted to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The resolution requested the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to convene an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop "the instrument," which is to be based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic, including its production, design, and disposal.

On 29 April 2024, the fourth session of the INC (INC-4) concluded in Ottawa with an advanced draft text for a Global Plastics Treaty. More than 2,500 delegates participated in the session (INC-4), representing 170 Members and over 480 Observer organisations including: non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations, and UN entities. The fifth session (INC-5) was scheduled for 25 November to 1 December, 2024 in Busan, Republic of Korea.



Delegates from Mexico, France, Panama and the European Union speak after a news conference in Busan, South Korea, where U.N. talks to curb plastic pollution took place. (Ahn Young-joon/AP)

On 1 December, 2024, the global talks in BUSAN, for a landmark treaty, to reduce plastic pollution, collapsed. Over 170 countries were deadlocked on how to deal with the world's growing mountain of plastic waste. More than 100 countries wanted measures to reduce plastic production. However, oil-rich nations wanted to target plastic pollution, not plastic itself. Negotiators said they hope to resume talks next year. The outcome underscores how the use of a material which underpins a global, multibillion-dollar industry, defies resolution. The Psychology behind such failures affects the people of **Ceathrú Thaidhg** as much as people anywhere. This has been examined, with them, regarding parallel issues, in another Subsidiary at [www.all-lives.institute](http://www.all-lives.institute)

The world annually produces more than 450 million metric tons of plastic, using fossil fuels (so creating GHGs): 350 million metric tons of

plastic waste is discarded. About 50% of this goes into landfills (as reported by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)). 19% is incinerated and less than 10% recycled. More enters rivers and oceans.

Panama's **Juan Carlos Monterrey Gómez**, whose delegation had proposed a reduction plastic production, described the talks as 'moral failure'. Russia and Saudi Arabia had instead backed a non-binding treaty - on improving waste management. "If you can stop plastic pollution, there should be no problem with producing plastics" Saudi Arabia's Abdulrahman Al Gwaiz said. Several oil-producing countries and some developing ones, such as India, said economic progress could not be prevented by limiting plastic production. "The solutions in the past century have always come from technology" Al Gwaiz said.

The Biden administration spoke for both sides, saying it supported a broad goal of reducing plastic pollution but that it opposed plastic production limits. Notably, the US is the world's top producer of plastic waste, according to the 2021 report from the National Academy of Sciences (in Washington, DC). The US produces almost twice as much as China and more than the entire European Union combined. The return of Donald Trump to the White House wrought confusion. Some delegates were concerned that Washington would become more hostile to a plastics treaty. These delegates themselves had spectacularly failed to advance any treaty.

Negotiators, hoping to impose stricter limits on plastic waste, openly expressed dissatisfaction as the talks ended. "We share the unhappiness that can be felt in this room" remarked Hugo-Maria Schally, the EU adviser for international environmental negotiations, during the plenary. Chris Jahn, Council Secretary of the International Council of Chemical Associations (an industry group), said it that talks must continue 'focused on addressing mismanaged waste'. Advocacy groups, meanwhile, reiterated the need for a more sweeping deal. Graham Forbes, the head of Greenpeace's delegation to the talks, said "the opportunity to secure an impactful plastics treaty that protects our health, biodiversity and climate remains within reach". As in the case of COP29, economics received cursory attention. This told its own story.

<https://www.climateaction.org/news/addressing-plastic-pollution-at-a-global-level-cop16-and-cop29-on-the-road> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2024/12/01/plastic-pollution-treaty-global-un-busan/>

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