



# A GLOBAL TREATY TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION THAT PEOPLE AND NATURE NEED

SECURING ESSENTIAL MEASURES AT INC-5

# INTRODUCTION

As states prepare to gather at the fifth and final session of the intergovernmental negotiations on the global treaty to end plastic pollution (INC-5), plastic pollution continues to ravage our planet, destroying ecosystems and wildlife populations, fuelling climate change and infiltrating our bodies through the air we breathe and the food and water we consume.

In the two years since the negotiations began, nearly 20 million metric tonnes of plastics have entered our ocean,<sup>1</sup> adding to the vast quantities that have accumulated in nature since production began in the 1950s. And levels of plastic pollution will continue to increase year on year unless we secure an effective and just treaty to end plastic pollution.

In the final round of negotiations, the international community faces a once-in-a-generation decision: to keep the promise made at UNEA 5.2 to end the crisis and put our planet on a path to recovery, or to shrink from that responsibility and let plastic pollution continue to wreak havoc on our planet, causing ever-greater harm to people and nature. The line between success and failure at INC-5 is clear. The meeting in November 2024 can be the moment our leaders decide on bold, binding global actions across the entire plastic lifecycle to protect nature and human health. If they fail to do so, they will go down in history for turning their backs on the planet, their citizens and the long-term prosperity of societies, in favour of short-term gains and industry interests.

**To ensure that world leaders deliver the treaty that people and nature need, WWF has identified four essential elements that – as a starting point – states must secure at INC-5.** As a priority, states must pursue binding, global obligations on the most problematic and concerning issues across the full plastic lifecycle, and the necessary means for all parties to implement them. Importantly, the treaty must be equipped to strengthen measures and expand states' efforts over time. Overall, any agreement secured at INC-5 must stipulate a credible pathway toward reducing plastic production and consumption, and include specific obligations to eliminate the most problematic elements of the plastics value chain and ensure all plastic we continue to produce is safe to reuse and circulate.

WWF supports states' commitment to strive for consensus and achieve universal adherence to the treaty – but not at the risk of creating a weak treaty which will fail to protect people and nature. If good faith negotiations break down, states that are committed to ending plastic pollution must be prepared to act boldly and come to INC-5 prepared to vote in favour of all four critical elements to be included in the treaty or to put forward a credible alternative pathway for their adoption.

A clear majority of states already support a treaty with binding obligations to deliver systemic changes. As do major private sector businesses, civil society organizations, and scientists and researchers in this field, who stand ready to make ambitious global rules work in practice. A treaty with binding obligations supported by the majority of stakeholders will be more effective than one based solely on voluntary national actions supported by all member states. **The world cannot wait: this November, we must secure an effective global treaty to end plastic pollution for good.**

## MUST-HAVES IN THE TREATY TEXT AT INC-5

### 1. Eliminate harmful plastics

- ✓ **Provisions to ban and phase-out** the most harmful plastic products and chemicals of concern

- ✓ **Global lists** and criteria for identification of plastic products and chemicals of concern to be banned and phased out according to stipulated time frames, starting with those most harmful to human health and the environment and feasible for elimination

### 2. Redesign products and systems

- ✓ **Global criteria** on plastic product design, focusing on recyclability and recycled content, reuse and reuse systems as a starting point

- ✓ **Global requirements** on the necessary systems to enable the circular economy transition over time

### 3. Align financial flows and ensure resources

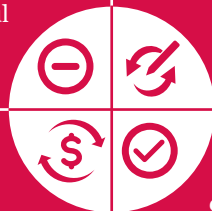
- ✓ **A comprehensive finance package** that leverages all available sources, aligns financial flows, including public and private financing, and an appropriate financial mechanism to mobilise and direct financial resources for implementation

- ✓ **Complementary technical assistance and technology transfers** to maximize implementation effectiveness

### 4. Future-proof the treaty for long-term success

- ✓ **Evidence-based mechanisms to report, assess and review** progress and effectiveness of measures, and potential necessary improvements

- ✓ **Effective decision-making mechanisms**, including in the absence of consensus among parties, to enable future adoption of necessary amendments to strengthen the treaty



# 1.

## GLOBAL BANS AND PHASE-OUTS OF THE MOST HARMFUL PLASTICS AND ASSOCIATED CHEMICALS

As a starting point, the treaty must include **binding, global bans and phase-outs of problematic and avoidable plastic products and chemicals of concern**. At INC-5, countries must agree to global, science-based criteria and initial lists of the most harmful plastic products and chemicals that can be immediately banned and gradually phased out. Plastic products that are either designed to be used once and immediately thrown away (single-use products), many of which may be harmful to human health and/or difficult to recycle – account for 60% of global plastic production and 70% of ocean pollution<sup>2</sup> and must therefore be urgently tackled.

### Key criteria for bans and phase-outs must include:

- Plastic products that have a high likelihood of ending up in the environment, are not suitable in a non-toxic circular economy or may cause the most severe harm as pollutants, and can be feasibly eliminated.
- Chemicals in plastic products that are known for their potential to cause severe harm to living organisms – being carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic (CMR), endocrine disruptors, or producing significant toxicity (among other criteria, including the substance’s persistence, bioaccumulation and mobility).

Five groups of plastic products, and substances in five groups of chemicals, have been proposed for elimination in a number of submissions by states.<sup>3</sup> WWF recommends the treaty’s initial global ban lists should start with these. The treaty must also include specific phaseout timelines and targets, as well as transparency and disclosure requirements, to ensure the complete elimination of these harmful plastics and chemicals from the plastic value chain (while allowing for specific exemptions, and possible timeline extensions, that are necessary in special circumstances for certain states). Additional groups of products and chemicals that meet the criteria for elimination should continue to be monitored and assessed after the treaty is adopted, and listed for future bans and phase-outs as appropriate.



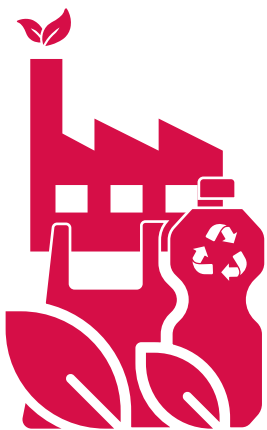
# 2.

## BINDING GLOBAL PRODUCT DESIGN REQUIREMENTS AND SYSTEMS FOR THE TRANSITION TOWARD A NON-TOXIC CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The treaty must establish **binding, global requirements on product design and performance** to ensure reduction, reuse, and safe recycling for the remaining plastics. Establishing these criteria must go hand-in-hand with a dedicated focus on setting up the systems needed to enable collection, reuse and recycling. As a starting point, the measures should target products that are consumed in high volumes, likely to become pollution and cause more harm due to their design, such as beverage bottles and food containers. Initial requirements should focus on priority plastic products’ reusability and recyclability, on recycled plastics, and on setting up essential systems to facilitate the circular economy transition.

Establishing harmonized global criteria for product design will provide the private sector with clear and consistent guidelines, a level playing field and regulatory certainty to align their innovation strategies and investment plans. Criteria for product reusability and reuse systems will optimize material efficiency and significantly displace single-use items, making it more feasible to avoid (and phase out) single-use plastics and lowering pollution rates.

From the outset, obligations on product design must lay the groundwork for the transition toward a non-toxic circular economy. To ensure an effective transition, additional requirements and technical guidelines for the necessary systems – such as reuse systems and extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes – and systemic changes will be needed after the treaty is adopted, building upon the initial obligations. As part of future improvements, in addition to general criteria for all plastics, parties should develop and adopt tailored and sector-specific criteria for priority sectors that contribute to plastic pollution: packaging, fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, textiles and transport.



# 3.

## ALIGNED FINANCIAL FLOWS AND SUFFICIENT RESOURCES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE



The treaty must include **a comprehensive finance package that leverages all available sources and aligns financial flows, including public and private financing, with the objectives of the treaty and the implementation of its measures.** This package will ensure predictable, adequate, equitable and accessible financial support to enable all parties to effectively implement the treaty. The financial resources needed are considerable, but the costs of *in*action (i.e. business-as-usual) are far greater, especially for low-income countries.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

Achieving the treaty's goal of ending plastic pollution demands that public and private activities and financial flows align with the treaty's core obligations. This means not only mobilizing and distributing additional financial resources – especially for implementation in developing countries – to reduce plastic pollution, but also stopping harmful financial flows that contribute to plastic pollution.

To complement the financial package, the treaty should ensure the provision of non-financial resources to enable effective implementation, particularly through technology transfer, technical assistance and capacity building. Sharing best practices, providing training programmes and fostering international cooperation will maximize the impact of any financial support, while also enhancing the technical and technological capabilities of all countries to collaboratively combat plastic pollution.

# 4.

## DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS THAT GUARANTEE MEASURES CAN BE ADAPTED AND STRENGTHENED OVER TIME



The treaty must include **mechanisms to allow for the strengthening of control measures and implementation measures beyond the treaty's adoption.** The current set of proposed priority measures provides a sound basis for global action; but to achieve the ultimate goal of ending plastic pollution, states must progressively expand and dial up their efforts over time, in accordance with emerging scientific evidence, assessments and monitoring of the treaty's effectiveness.

A transition to a non-toxic circular economy that is aligned with planetary boundaries and which prioritizes reuse systems and high quality recycling will incentivise the retention of materials in the economy and reduce the demand for short-lived single-use plastic products. In order to deliver on this goal in the long run, we will need to continuously develop and adopt measures which address the full life cycle of plastic.

To prepare for gradual strengthening, as a priority the treaty must include requirements for data collection, transparent reporting mechanisms and regular assessments to track progress and identify areas for improvement. It also needs mechanisms that allow for experts to make technical recommendations to the decision-making body, based on sound scientific evidence and emerging knowledge and technologies.

Importantly, the treaty must include provisions specifying how parties may decide on necessary additions or amendments to the treaty – to strengthen existing rules by expanding connected annexes, and to adopt new binding rules, as necessary. This should include provisions which allow for voting in cases where consensus cannot be reached.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Pew Charitable Trusts. 2020. [Breaking the Plastic Wave](#).
- 2 WWF. 2023. [Breaking down high-risk plastic products](#).
- 3 <https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf-brief-oeeg2-aug-2024--eng.pdf>
- 4 WWF. 2021. [Plastics: the costs to society, the environment and the economy](#)
- 5 Nordic Co-operation. 2022. [Global agreement to prevent plastic pollution: Exploring financing needs and opportunities](#)
- 6 WWF. 2023. [Who pays for plastic pollution: enabling global equity in the plastic value chain](#)



**IN THE 10 MINUTES IT TOOK YOU TO READ  
THIS PAPER, PLASTIC POLLUTION IN OUR  
OCEAN INCREASED BY ROUGHLY 200 TONNES.**



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