


NOT JUST ANOTHER DROP IN THE OCEAN: ENSURING UNOC 3 DELIVERS TANGIBLE IMPACT FOR THE OCEAN



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JOINT STATEMENT

We, members of the Surfrider Foundation global network, have acted for decades¹ to protect and preserve our Ocean and the communities that depend on and enjoy the Ocean and seas over the globe.

The third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3), taking place in Nice (France) from June 9-13, co-hosted by France and Costa Rica, is a **major opportunity** to assess progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) "Life Below Water" and advance concrete actions to protect and sustainably use the Ocean.

In the face of an increasingly alarming environmental crisis - marked by accelerating biodiversity loss, climate change, and the escalating marine pollution crisis - including from plastics - UNOC 3 comes at a critical juncture. It has the potential to set the stage for transformative joint actions and international agreements, including the long-awaited Global Plastics Treaty, with negotiations set to continue in August in Geneva. **Surfrider Foundation global network stands ready to contribute to this historic moment, urging governments to turn commitments into actions and accelerate their efforts!**

UNOC 3: AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVERSE THE TREND FOR A HEALTHY OCEAN FREE OF PLASTICS IN THE LEAD-UP TO GENEVA

Surfrider Foundation global's network has gathered plastic pollution data as the main type of waste impacting our ocean, seas and blue spaces across the world, both visible (macro-plastics) and invisible (microplastics and nanoplastics). This data has served as a foundation for advocating bold, science-based policies. But NGOs cannot address the crisis alone. During the same decades, plastic pollution has persisted due to an increase in global production and a lack of ambition from policymakers and the private sector.



- Plastic pollution has been documented to **harm more than 700 marine species**, including over **90% of seabirds**, through ingestion, entanglement, and habitat disruption. By 2050, 99% of seabirds will have ingested plastic²;
- Reaching **460 Mt in 2019**, global plastic production is expected to **triple by 2060**, and **more than a half will end up in landfills**³;
- Plastics contain more than **16,000 known chemicals**, with a quarter of plastic chemicals being known to be hazardous, and 66% having no available hazard data. To date, only 6% of plastic chemicals are currently regulated globally;
- Microplastics are present in our **organs**, from our lungs, livers and brain, including in placenta with 100% of **placenta** tests samples showing contamination⁴; this raises critical health concern that can rise chances to develop diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and many cancers⁵;

¹ See for example our joint recommendations: Recommendations from Surfrider International affiliates for the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the UNEA Resolution 5/14 to End Plastic Pollution (May 2023); Ocean Call (August 2019): https://www.surfrider.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/oceancall_long_EN.pdf

² Van Maanen, M. A., et al. The Challenges of Plastics in the Marine Environment. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 112, no. 38, pp 11600-11605, 2015.

³ Perspectives mondiales des plastiques : scénarios d'action à l'horizon 2060, OCDE 2022.

⁴ Placenta: First evidence of microplastics in human placenta, Antonio Ragusa, et al. Raman Microspectroscopy Detection and Characterisation of Microplastics in Human Breastmilk, Antonio Ragusa et al., 2002.

⁵ Symeonides et. al. An Umbrella Review of Meta-Analyses Evaluating Associations between Human Health and Exposure to Major Classes of Plastic-Associated Chemicals. Ann Glob Health 2024; 90 (1): 52, 1-54.

JOINT STATEMENT

- Plastic pollution **exacerbates the impacts of other major crises** affecting the ocean, including biodiversity loss and climate change (see below). As a result, it undermines the ocean's overall resilience and its ability to continue providing vital ecosystem services for present and future generations. These services range from carbon sequestration and energy generation to food provision, recreation, and overall human health and well-being.
- Meanwhile, the **right to a clean and healthy environment** is increasingly recognized as a human right. Yet, plastic pollution severely undermines this right by exposing nearby communities – including informal waste pickers at the forefront - and humans to toxic emissions and long-term ecological harm.

Given the wide-ranging impacts of marine pollution, it was among the first environmental crises to be acknowledged and addressed within international frameworks. Yet, we remain far from resolving it. **Despite the scale and urgency of this issue, plastic pollution has been largely absent from the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) agenda for months—an omission that must be urgently rectified and reinforced in the UNOC 3 Declaration.**

Plastics must stay a priority, in particular, on the international stage. The fifth session of negotiations, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, concluded in December 2024 without reaching a final agreement. Despite significant progress in earlier sessions, negotiations stalled due to opposition from major plastic-producing countries. **Plastics must be a key priority of UNOC before the next round of negotiations – which includes reinforcing the wording on this matter in the UNOC 3 Declaration - to keep the momentum and ratchet-up the ambition for an effective and bold Treaty.**



To this end, Surfrider calls Member States to reaffirm their will for an ambitious Treaty that:

- Stops pollution at source;
- Protects the environment and human health from all adverse effects and risks related to plastics – including microplastics and nanoplastics – in a comprehensive life cycle approach based on the precautionary principle.
- Integrates the full life cycle of plastics, from plastics production and consumption to marine litter for an efficient Plastics Treaty.
- Sets a global plastic reduction target of 75% by 2050 in alignment with the Paris Agreement, with key legally binding pollution prevention measures that apply to all State Parties.
- Aligns the entire plastics value chain with respect for human rights and social and environmental justice by minimizing health and environmental impacts.
- Includes the elimination of the most problematic plastic products and chemicals of concern present in plastics.
- Promotes zero waste, reuse and refillable systems, encourages the development of eco-design and supervises the development of the right alternatives.

TIME TO BREAK SILOS AT UNOC 3: ADOPTING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE TRIPLE CRISIS

Science is clear: we are facing a Triple Planetary crisis. Climate change, loss of biodiversity and increasing pollution including from plastics, all driven by human activities, represent an unprecedented threat to the Ocean, nature, blue communities, present and future generations, human rights, health and well-being. **These interconnected threats call for a common and bold response which includes stopping pollution, including plastic pollution at its source.**

Plastic pollution is fueling the climate and biodiversity crises, with plastics production contributing to 3.4% of global GHG emissions in 2019⁶ and occurring at all stages of the plastic life cycle. With 99% of plastics being made from fossil feedstocks, plastic waste appears as another major pollution generated by the fossil fuel industry. Moreover, plastic is increasingly being leveraged by big oil and gas as a key area for growth and revenue.

Similarly, impacts on marine biodiversity occur throughout the life cycle of plastics, from the offshore extraction of oil and gas to microplastics being added to products and released into the environment, including through abrasion, shedding, spillage, dumping and leakages. Macroplastics, including single-use plastics, result in the deaths of millions of marine animals each year due to entanglement, suffocation, or ingestion of plastics⁷. In addition, plastics pollution contributes to habitat destruction, through chemical and microbial transfer, harming ecosystems like coral reefs and mangroves⁸ that play a key role in climate change adaptation.

Instead of a siloed approach, UNOC 3 offers the chance to adopt a global and holistic approach to preserve the Ocean and address all these crises through biodiversity-positive solutions, policy ambition and political will. To this end, Surfriders reiterate the urgency to:

- Adopt science-based measures while recognizing community science and indigenous knowledge;
- Immediately ban offshore oil and gas exploration and exploitation and to cease all grants and subsidies for fossil energy sources;
- Reduce emissions globally, decrease global energy demand and develop renewable energy to mitigate the effects of climate change and diversify the sources of low-carbon energy production. These developments must not be at the expense of biodiversity and natural heritage, must not undermine protection efforts and must be carried out in dialogue with civil society;
- Preserve and restore coastal and marine ecosystems, notably blue carbon ecosystems, that deliver a wide array of co-benefits in addition to their role in climate action;
- Promote and Integrate in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions instead of heavy engineering solutions to adapt to climate change or sequester carbon;
- Ensure by 2030 at least 30 per cent of marine coastal areas are effectively conserved and managed, including at least 10% under effective restoration (30x30);
- Accelerate adaptation of coastal territories and islands to climate change notably through the deployment and investment in nature-based solutions and the exchange of best practices, notably through the Ocean Rise & Resilience Coalition to be launched ahead of UNOC 3;
- Transition our blue economy globally to a low impact, pollution free and generative blue economy, starting with putting an end to all harmful and destructive activities happening at sea and on the coastlines and reduce all impacts of land-based activities which severely impact on our ocean;
- Agree on a global Moratorium to ban deep-sea mining;
- Ratify the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Treaty as an urgent matter and at the latest by the end of 2025;
- Adopt without delay a ban on the use and carriage of heavy fuel oil (HFO) by shipping in the Arctic to address HFO spill risk and reduce black carbon emissions and drastically reduce the impacts of shipping on the marine environment from the loss of containers, waste generation to its noise and GHG emissions.

⁶ OECD. Plastics: The Environmental Crisis. August 18, 2022.

⁷ European Commission. Microplastics: A European Overview. JRC Scientific and Technical Reports. 2017.

⁸ Suyadi & Manullang. Distribution of plastic debris pollution and its implications on mangrove vegetation. Mar. Pollut. Bull. 160, 111642. 2020.



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