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In 2022, the **IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL)** created the Plastic Pollution Task Force to provide insights and support to the Treaty negotiation process. The following is one of a series of ten targeted legal briefs that are part of the present IUCN Submission for the third Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

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[IUCN WCEL Briefings for Negotiators for INC-3](#)

These are updated briefings of the INC-1 and INC-1 submissions, please note, and are considered version 3 – for submission to INC-3 as annexes for Forms A and B from IUCN. Further information can be found on <https://www.iucn.org/incplastics> - or by searching <https://www.iucn.org/search?key=plastics>.

BRIEFING 8 of 10: Connections between IUCN’s Plastic Pollution Elimination Timeline and the SDGs

**IUCN WCEL BRIEFING FOR NEGOTIATORS
International Legally Binding Instrument INC-3 Session
Connections between IUCN’s Plastic Pollution Elimination Timeline and the SDGs**

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of its Agenda 2030 Resolution. The UNGA created the SDGs as the successor entities to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were operational from 2000 – 2015 and intended to address the most pressing global problems at the dawn of the new millennium.

Following the expiration of the MDGs, the decision was made to create the SDGs as a more in-depth and nuanced set of 17 Goals, over 160 targets and several hundred associated indicators to guide UN operations and Member State actions from 2015 to 2030. Generally, the target dates for accomplishment of the SDG are 2030 with some exceptions. The SDGs are voluntary and thus non-binding under international law yet reflect many aspects of customary international law as well as intersections with various treaty regimes.

At its 2020 World Conservation Congress, IUCN’s Members adopted Resolution 7.019 on *Stopping the global plastic pollution crisis in marine environments by 2030*. To accomplish this goal, the Resolution asked the international community to reach a global agreement to combat marine plastic pollution, in order to:

- a. Ensure resource efficiency and circular economy through the elimination of unnecessary production and use of plastic, in particular single-use items, and through the promotion of innovation along the entire value chain, facilitating responsible

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management of plastic waste and scrap and stopping leakage in nature and in the oceans;

- b. Promote responsible management of single-use plastic waste and scrap that prevents its leakage into the environment;
- c. Invest in environmentally sound plastic waste collection and recycling and disposal systems, based on separate collection of plastic waste and recycling in the first instance, and other forms of recovery, prevention and alternatives to plastic, where recycling of environmentally sound plastic waste is not possible, considering all their impacts on the environment;
- d. Introduce measures that take appropriate national actions for the prevention and significant reduction of discharges of plastic litter to the ocean, in partnership with relevant stakeholders;
- e. Work with other international efforts, including the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, New Plastics Economy, Consumer Goods Forum Plastics Working Group and Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership, to improve knowledge of the sources of plastics and their impact on the environment, and particularly on biodiversity and human health;
- f. Carry out public-awareness measures aimed at sustainable consumption and improved waste management; and
- g. Mobilise technical and financial support to facilitate implementation of these actions.

To facilitate this and in recognition of the increasingly dire issue of plastic pollution, Resolution 7.019 designated 2030 as the target date.

Also at its 2020 World Conservation Congress, IUCN Members adopted Resolution 7.069, *Eliminate plastic pollution in protected areas*, with priority action on single-use plastic products, and urged State Members to act to implement this by 2025.

IUCN's proposed timeline of ending pollution from single use plastic by 2025 and ending all plastic pollution by 2030 in the International Legally Binding Instrument (ILBI) could serve a significant role in facilitating the accomplishment of many SDGs and their targets at a time when all progress in this direction is critical. In the below discussion, this briefing highlights the ties between State accomplishment of a number SDGs and the ILBI, emphasizing the need to use IUCN's robust timelines for ending plastic pollution as a tool for States to implement their commitments under the SDGs.

SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Target 2.4 provides that States will “ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production.” In the context of the Plastics Treaty, the adoption of an ambitious timeline such as that proposed by IUCN would allow States to take measures toward sustainability in food and agriculture by mandating transitions away from practices that generate plastic pollution and waste.

SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

In Target 3.9, States commit to “substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination” by 2030. The reduction of plastic pollution is inherently linked to achievement of Target 3.9 both in terms of the emissions needed to produce plastic and the increasingly understood connections between plastic contamination and human health issues. By adopting the ambitious timeline for the elimination of plastic pollution proposed by IUCN, States could also implement measures that advance their commitments to human health under Target 3.9.



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SDG 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

In Target 6.3, States undertake to “improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.” By ending single use plastic pollution by 2025 and plastic pollution overall by 2030, IUCN’s proposed timeline for the ILBI would support States in their efforts to implement the requirements of Target 6.3 across the spectrum of water quality as well as recycling and reuse efforts throughout the plastics lifecycle.

SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Included in Target 8.4 is the commitment of States to “endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation.” By using the ambitious IUCN timeline for ending plastic pollution, the ILBI could further Target 8.4 by requiring the implementation of circular economy, design substitution and sustainable consumption in practice. This would allow for global and national advances in the process of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation as well as the use of sustainability throughout the supply chain.

SDG 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Target 9.4, “upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities,” is linked to the issue of plastics pollution across all levels of the plastics lifecycle. From infrastructural and industrial practices at the production level to consumption level to disposal and end of the product lifecycle, the elimination of single use plastic pollution and plastic pollution generally will require inherent changes. By requiring these changes on an ambitious timeline, the ILBI would also facilitate State implementation of Target 9.4 by 2030.

SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Given the reality of plastic pollution concentration in and caused by urban settlements, there is a connection between the elimination of plastic pollution and the requirements of Target 11.6 for States to “reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.” There are also connections between waste management and plastic pollution in the context of cities. Each of these aspects of Target 11.6 would be advanced by adoption of IUCN’s proposed timeline for the elimination of plastic pollution for the Plastics Treaty. As a corollary, reductions in plastic pollution in urban areas could also contribute to the aspects of Target 11.7 regarding State commitments to “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces.”

At a general level, eliminating plastic pollution on an ambitious timeline could have a supporting effect for State commitments to “protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage” in line with Target 11.4. This is especially important since so many of the designated UNESCO sites of natural heritage are linked to water and marine ecosystems that are also impacted by plastic pollution.

SDG 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Eliminating plastic pollution and regulating the plastics lifecycle on an ambitious timeline such as that proposed by IUCN could assist States with achieving many commitments under SDG 12, notably:

Target 12.1 – “Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries.”

Target 12.5 – “By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.”

Target 12.6 – “Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.”

Target 12.7 – “Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.”

SDG 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

The connection between aspects of plastic production and carbon emissions, as well as the fossil fuels used in plastics, creates a nexus between efforts to regulate climate change and to eliminate plastic pollution generally. In this way, using IUCN’s proposed timeline for plastic pollution elimination could assist States in achieving Target 13.2, “integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.”

SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

In Target 14.1, the UNGA can be seen as highlighting the importance of combatting marine pollution on a more advanced timeframe, providing that “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.” Thus, adopting IUCN’s proposed timeframe for eliminating plastic pollution would be critical to ensuring States are able to implement these requirements in relation to plastic wastes within the designated timeframe.

Relatedly, including ghost gear and similar products within the scope of plastic pollution to be eliminated in the ILBI would allow States to further the elements of Target 14.7, “by 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism,” when combined with an ambitious timeline for the elimination of plastic pollution.

SDG 15 - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Given the potential impacts of eliminating single use plastic pollution, and plastic pollution generally, on preventing degradation of multiple ecosystems through soil, water and associated damage, the ILBI offers the potential for States to take steps toward their commitments in Target 15.3 (“By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world”) and Target 15.4 (“By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for



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sustainable development). To facilitate the achievement of these Targets, however, it is necessary to adopt an ambition timeline on the elimination of plastic pollution such as that proposed by IUCN.
