



**United Nations  
Environment Programme**

# Agenda: **Drastically Reducing Maritime Pollution, including Plastic**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**
2. **INTRODUCTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY**
3. **ABOUT THE AGENDA**
4. **ADAPTED SOLUTIONS**
5. **PRESENT WORLD SOLUTION**
6. **CONCLUSION**
7. **REFERENCE SKILLS**

## **LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

### **BOARD**

Honourable Delegates,

It is our utmost pleasure to welcome you to the Fair Gaze Model United Nations, we are honoured to direct the United Nations Environment Assembly, and look forward to interact with you all.

To the MUN veterans out there, we hope you'll have an enriching debate and to the newcomers, we are really excited to be a part of your experience.

What we desire from the delegates is not experience, or how articulate they are. Rather, we want to see how he/she can respect differences of opinion and work around these, while extending their own stance so that it encompasses more of the others without compromising their own stand, thereby reaching acceptable, and practical solutions.

The following pages are supposed to guide you with the agenda as well as the Council. The Guide touches upon all the different aspects that are relevant and is expected to contribute to fruitful speaking sessions in the Council.

However, it has to be noted that the background guide only contains basic information which may form the basis for the speech and your research.

We hope that you put in substantial efforts to research and get all of the important facts of the agenda. Let's make the Council's direction and debate positive and productive.

Best of Luck!

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY**

The United Nations Environment Assembly is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It addresses the critical environmental challenges facing the world today. Understanding these challenges and preserving and rehabilitating our environment is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Environment Assembly meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the Assembly provides leadership and catalyses intergovernmental action on the environment. Decision-making requires broad participation, which is why the Assembly provides an opportunity for all peoples to help design solutions for our planet's health. The United Nations Environment Assembly was created in June 2012, when world leaders called for UN Environment to be strengthened and upgraded during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as RIO+20. The Environment Assembly embodies a new era in which the environment is at the centre of the international community's focus and is given the same level of prominence as issues such as peace, poverty, health and security. The establishment of the Environment Assembly was the culmination of decades of international efforts, initiated at the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and aimed at creating a coherent system of international environmental governance. The Assembly is led by a Bureau and its President. The UN Environment Assembly

Bureau assists the President in the general conduct of business of the UN Environment Assembly. The Bureau is composed of ten Ministers of the Environment for a term of two years, and follows geographical rotations.

## **ABOUT THE AGENDA**

Maritime pollution is a combination of chemicals and trash, most of which comes from land sources and is washed or blown into the ocean. This pollution results in damage to the environment, to the health of all organisms, and to economic structures worldwide. Marine pollution is a growing problem in today's world. Our ocean is being flooded with two main types of pollution: chemicals and trash.

Chemical contamination, or nutrient pollution, is concerning for health, environmental, and economic reasons. This type of pollution occurs when human activities, notably the use of fertilizer on farms, lead to the runoff of chemicals into waterways that ultimately flow into the ocean. The increased concentration of chemicals, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, in the coastal ocean promotes the growth of algal blooms, which can be toxic to wildlife and harmful to humans. The negative effects on health and the environment caused by algal blooms hurt local fishing and tourism industries.

Marine trash encompasses all manufactured products—most of them plastic—that end up in the ocean. Littering, storm winds, and poor waste management all contribute to the accumulation of this debris, 80 percent of which comes from sources on land.

Common types of marine debris include various plastic items like shopping bags and beverage bottles, along with cigarette

butts, bottle caps, food wrappers, and fishing gear. Plastic waste is particularly problematic as a pollutant because it is so long-lasting. Plastic items can take hundreds of years to decompose.

This trash poses dangers to both humans and animals. Fish become tangled and injured in the debris, and some animals mistake items like plastic bags for food and eat them. Small organisms feed on tiny bits of broken-down plastic, called microplastic, and absorb the chemicals from the plastic into their tissues. Microplastics are less than five millimeters (0.2 inches) in diameter and have been detected in a range of marine species, including plankton and whales. When small organisms that consume microplastics are eaten by larger animals, the toxic chemicals then become part of their tissues. In this way, the microplastic pollution migrates up the food chain, eventually becoming part of the food that humans eat.

Solutions for marine pollution include prevention and clean-up. Disposable and single-use plastic is abundantly used today, from shopping bags to shipping packaging to plastic bottles. Changing society's approach to plastic use will be a long and economically challenging process. Clean-up, in contrast, may be impossible for some items. Many types of debris (including some plastics) do not float, so they are lost deep in the ocean. Plastics that do float tend to collect in large "patches" in ocean gyres. The Pacific Garbage Patch is one example of such a collection, with plastics and microplastics floating on and below the surface of swirling ocean currents between California and Hawaii in an area of about 1.6 million square kilometres (617,763 square miles), although its size is not fixed. These patches are less like islands of trash and, as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says, more like flecks of microplastic pepper swirling around an ocean soup. Even some promising solutions are inadequate for combating marine pollution. So-called "biodegradable" plastics often break down only at temperatures higher than will ever be reached in the ocean.

Nonetheless, many countries are taking action. According to a 2018 report from the United Nations, more than sixty countries have enacted regulations to limit or ban the use of disposable plastic items. Marine pollution occurs when substances used or

spread by humans, such as industrial, agricultural, and residential waste, particles, noise, excess carbon dioxide or invasive organisms enter the ocean and cause harmful effects there. Most of this waste (80%) comes from land-based activity, although marine transportation significantly contributes as well. Since most inputs come from land, either via the rivers, sewage, or the atmosphere, it means that continental shelves are more vulnerable to pollution. Air pollution is also a contributing factor by carrying off iron, carbonic acid, nitrogen, silicon, sulphur, pesticides, or dust particles into the ocean. The pollution often comes from nonpoint sources such as agricultural runoff, wind-blown debris, and dust. These nonpoint sources are largely due to runoff that enters the ocean through rivers, but wind-blown debris and dust can also play a role, as these pollutants can settle into waterways and oceans. Pathways of pollution include direct discharge, land runoff, ship pollution, atmospheric pollution and, potentially, deep sea mining.

The types of marine pollution can be grouped as pollution from marine debris, plastic pollution, including microplastics, ocean acidification, nutrient pollution, toxins, and underwater noise. Plastic pollution in the ocean is a type of marine pollution by plastics, ranging in size from large original material such as bottles and bags, down to microplastics formed from the fragmentation of plastic material. Marine debris is mainly discarded human rubbish which floats on or is suspended in the ocean. Plastic pollution is harmful to marine life.

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