



New International Co-operation to Tackle Marine Debris

***Honolulu Commitment* among outcomes of Fifth International Marine Debris Conference in Hawaii**

Honolulu (USA) / Nairobi, 25 March 2011 – Government representatives, major industries and leading marine researchers have come together to make a new set of commitments to tackle the widespread problem of debris in the world's seas and oceans.

Despite decades of efforts to prevent and reduce marine debris, such as discarded plastic, abandoned fishing nets and industrial waste, there is evidence that the problem continues to grow. A lack of co-ordination between global and regional programmes, deficiencies in the enforcement of existing regulations and unsustainable consumption and production patterns have aggravated the problem.

By bringing together experts from some 35 countries, governments, research bodies, corporations including the Coca-Cola Company, and trade associations such as Plastics Europe, the Fifth International Marine Debris Conference resulted in new commitments and partnerships to address the issue of marine debris at global, national and local levels.

A key outcome of the conference, which was co-organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and held in Honolulu, Hawaii from 20 to 25 March 2011, the *Honolulu Commitment* marks a new, cross-sectoral approach to help reduce the occurrence of marine debris, as well as the extensive damage it causes to marine habitats, the global economy, biodiversity and the risks posed to human health.

The Commitment encourages sharing of technical, legal and market-based solutions to reduce marine debris, improving local and regional understanding of the scale and impact of the problem and advocating the improvement of waste management worldwide.

“Marine debris – trash in our oceans – is a symptom of our throw-away society and our approach to how we use our natural resources. It affects every country and every ocean, and shows us in highly visible terms the urgency of shifting towards a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy as nations prepare for Rio+20 in 2012,” said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner in a message to conference delegates. “The impact of marine debris today on flora and fauna in the oceans is one that we must now address with greater speed,” added Mr. Steiner

“However, one community or one country acting in isolation will not be the answer. We need to address marine debris collectively across national boundaries and with the private sector, which has a critical role to play both in reducing the kinds of wastes that can end up in the world’s oceans, and through research into new materials. It is by bringing all these players together that we can truly make a difference,” said Mr. Steiner.

The Commitment marks the first step in the development of a comprehensive global platform for the prevention, reduction and management of marine debris, to be known as the *Honolulu Strategy*.

This document – currently being developed by conference delegates, UNEP, NOAA and international marine debris experts – will aim to provide a strategic framework for co-ordinated action plans to prevent, reduce and manage sources of marine debris. The Strategy will be finalised following the conference.

"This conference comes at a critical time for our world" said Monica Medina, NOAA's Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. "The oceans and coasts are facing a multitude of stressors, including marine debris, that lead to consequences that have both ecosystem and economic impacts. It is vitally important to bring together people committed to these issues to share ideas, develop partnerships and move us all a step closer to the changes that are badly needed for our oceans and coasts."

Marine debris: risks to livelihoods, wildlife and human health

The impacts of marine debris are far-reaching, with serious consequences for marine habitats, biodiversity, human health and the global economy.

- At least 267 marine species worldwide are affected by entanglement in or ingestion of marine debris, including 86 percent of all sea turtles species, 44 percent of all seabird species and 43 percent of all marine mammal species.
- There is growing concern over the potential impact on human health of toxic substances released by plastic waste in the ocean. Small particles (known as 'microplastics') made up of disintegrating plastic items or lost

plastic pellets used by industry, may accumulate contaminants linked to cancer, reproductive problems and other health risks. Scientists are studying whether these contaminants can enter the food chain when microplastics are ingested by marine animals.

- Accumulated debris on beaches and shorelines can have a serious economic impact on communities that are dependent on tourism.
- Marine debris may house communities of invasive species which can disrupt marine habitats and ecosystems. Heavy items of marine debris can damage habitats such as coral reefs and affect the foraging and feeding habits of marine animals.

Surfing for Solutions in Hawaii

One of the key themes to emerge from the Fifth International Marine Debris Conference was the need to improve global waste management.

The Honolulu Strategy will outline several approaches for the reduction of marine debris, including prevention at land- and sea-based sources, and the need to see waste as a resource to be managed. It will also call for public awareness campaigns on the negative impacts of improper waste disposal on our seas and oceans – targeting street litter, illegal dumping of rubbish and poorly-managed waste dumps.

Improving national waste management programmes not only helps reduce the volume of waste in the world's seas and oceans and subsequent damage to the marine environment, but can also bring real economic benefits.

In the Republic of Korea, for example, a policy of Extended Producer Responsibility has been enforced on packaging (paper, glass, iron, aluminium and plastic) and specific products (batteries, tyres, lubricating oil) since 2003. This initiative has resulted in the recycling of 6 million metric tonnes of waste between 2003 and 2007, increasing the country's recycling rate by 14 percent and creating economic benefits equivalent to US\$1.6 billion.

Waste management is one of ten economic sectors highlighted in UNEP's Green Economy Report, launched in February 2011. The report highlights enormous opportunities for turning land-based waste – the major contributor to marine debris – into a more economically valuable resource. The value of the waste-to-energy market, for example, which was estimated at US\$20 billion in 2008 is projected to grow by 30 percent by 2014.

The scaling-up of a transition to a low carbon, more resource-efficient Green Economy is one of two key pillars of the United Nations Sustainable Development conference to be held in Brazil next year. Also known as Rio+20,

the conference aims to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development and address new and emerging challenges – twenty years after the landmark Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Notes to Editors

For more information on UNEP's work on marine debris, please visit:

www.unep.org/marinelitter

Information on NOAA's Marine Debris Program can be found at

www.marinedebris.noaa.gov

The Honolulu Commitment can be found at this link:

www.unep.org/pdf/PressReleases/Honolulu_Compmitment-FINAL.pdf

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