

U.S. Comments on the Draft Pacific Islands Declaration on the Prevention of Plastic Pollution and its Impacts

The United States appreciates the efforts of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) on the Draft Pacific Islands Declaration on the Prevention of Plastic Pollution and its Impacts to advance the region's progress in addressing ocean plastic pollution. The United States recognizes that ocean plastic pollution presents an urgent and global concern, and we look forward to attending the Environment Minister's High-Level Talanoa on September 10. The United States encourages refocusing the Declaration in a manner, as suggested below, that would focus on mismanaged plastic wastes or plastic pollution, while promoting three objectives:

- Securing broad-based political support of governments for global action to address ocean plastic pollution;
- Creating momentum toward the successful adoption of a mandate at UNEA 5.2; and
- Identifying key issues that will require further deliberations, whether at UNEA 5.2 or subsequently in the course of implementing the mandate.

In order to achieve the first two objectives, the United States urges that the Declaration highlight the broad points of convergence that have emerged during recent international discussions:

- 1) interest in preventing and reducing the discharge of plastic pollution into the ocean and emphasizing the role of environmentally sound waste management to mitigate against the deleterious impacts on environment, economy and potentially human health;
- 2) the need for global action to address this problem;
- 3) the fact that the issue is ripe for a mandate to be adopted at UNEA 5.2;
- 4) recognition of the need to take into account national circumstances; and
- 5) recognition of the need to work with stakeholders.

Many of the elements proposed in the draft would, in our view, undermine these objectives – by reducing the number of countries that can sign on and/or by diminishing the momentum toward a positive outcome at UNEA 5.2.

In order to achieve the third objective, we suggest that the Declaration also articulate the key elements of global action in which countries, to date, have expressed a desire for further discussion. However, we strongly caution against including details that we see as pre-negotiating the framing and content of such elements, thereby pre-judging the outcome of UNEA 5.2 and subsequent processes. As an alternative, proponents of this draft could also consider developing a regional declaration or declaration that countries can individually endorse.

In addition to these broader framing questions, we provide the following general comments on the Draft Declaration for your consideration:

We find that the Declaration inappropriately conflates “plastics” with “plastic pollution.” Plastics are products that often have critically important applications, including as medical supplies. We recommend using neutral language related to ocean plastic pollution that reflects the experiences of all SPREP countries. We maintain that all countries have a part to play in addressing this problem and that the Declaration should work toward building collaboration to address ocean plastic pollution at UNEA 5.2.

We support the recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement and encourage consideration of innovative approaches for collaboration with stakeholders. We urge the Declaration to reflect the need to engage the private sector, NGOs, and sub-national governments in finding solutions to ocean plastic pollution.