

# Marine Litter: A Global Challenge



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Prepared by  
Ljubomir Jeftic, Seba Sheavly, and Ellik Adler

Edited by Nikki Meith

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## Preface

Marine litter is a global concern affecting all the oceans of the world. It poses environmental, economic, health and aesthetic problems that are rooted in poor solid waste management practices, lack of infrastructure, indiscriminate human activities and behaviours and an inadequate understanding on the part of the public of the potential consequences of their actions. The UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter has provided an effective framework for conducting regional activities addressing marine litter around the world, including those of the 12 participating Regional Seas programmes.

The objective of this document is (1) to present and analyse available information on marine litter discussed in documents produced by the 12 regional programmes with the help of regional consultants and technical experts and (2) to propose recommendations for addressing the problems associated with marine litter worldwide.

This document is not a comprehensive overview of global marine litter, but it does provide current information on the marine litter issue in participating regions (Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Caspian, East African Seas, Eastern Africa, Mediterranean, Northeast Atlantic, Northwest Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South Asian Seas, South Pacific, and Wider Caribbean).

Chapter 1, *Facing the global challenge of marine litter*, introduces the topic and the challenges marine litter poses to the international community. It describes the main sources and impacts of marine litter and how UNEP has begun to address these through its Regional Seas Programme and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA), and the UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter. Finally it outlines the existing international and regional initiatives that address marine litter problems.

Chapter 2, *Review of regional assessments and regional action plans on marine litter*, presents summaries of the documents produced as part of the UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter, including 12 regional overviews and seven regional action plans. In addition, a summary of the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) programme is presented, covering ICC events carried out in 132 countries of the world and in 73 countries of the 12 Regional Seas that are part of the UNEP Global Marine Litter Initiative.

Chapter 3, *Analysis of regional review documents and action plans on marine litter*, presents an analysis of the information and data presented in 12 regional assessment documents and seven Regional Action Plans summarized in Chapter 2 of this document.

Chapter 4, *The way forward*, provides a discussion of the general conclusions and proposed recommendations presented in this overview, and also offers conclusions and recommendations related to nine specific issues that are important for the understanding, control and reduction of the global problem of marine litter.





## Executive summary

### Introduction

#### About marine litter

Marine litter is an environmental, economic, human health and aesthetic problem. It poses a complex and multi-dimensional challenge with significant implications for the marine and coastal environment and human activities all over the world. These impacts are both cultural and multi-sectoral, rooted primarily in poor practices of solid waste management, a lack of infrastructure, various human activities, an inadequate understanding on the part of the public of the potential consequences of their actions, the lack of adequate legal and enforcement systems and a lack of financial resources.

Marine litter is found in all the oceans of the world, not only in densely populated regions, but also in remote areas far from obvious sources and human contact. Every year marine litter takes an enormous social and economic toll on people and communities around the world. The persistence of marine litter is the result of a lack of coordinated global and regional strategies and of deficiencies in the implementation and enforcement of existing programmes, regulations and standards at all levels – international, regional and national.

#### The UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter

The UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter provides a platform for the management of this problem through the establishment of partnerships, cooperative arrangements and coordination of joint activities. The main partners in the initiative include individual Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, government representatives, United Nations bodies, donor agencies and organizations, the private sector and NGOs. This partnership represents a unified effort within the wider context of the Global Programme of Action, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and the respective mandates of other regional stakeholders. Existing solutions may be tailored and replicated for specific regions, comprising innovative economic incentives to prevent litter and encourage the cleanup, prevention and management of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear, harmonization of monitoring and assessment systems, and establishment of adequate reception facilities for maritime garbage and wastes.

#### Participation of Regional Seas in the Global Initiative on Marine Litter

The UNEP Global Initiative on Marine Litter has been successful in organizing, implementing and promoting regional activities on marine litter around the world. Work in each participating region has proceeded according to agreements on the development of marine litter management activities concluded between the Regional Seas Coordinating Office and the Regional Coordinating Units (secretariats) of 12 Regional Seas programmes (Conventions and Action Plans): Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Caspian, East Asian Seas, Eastern Africa/WIO, Mediterranean, Northeast Atlantic, Northwest Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South Asian Seas, Southeast Pacific, and the Wider Caribbean.

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