

INFORMAL DIALOGUE ON PLASTIC POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PLASTICS TRADE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR PRESS

The Informal Dialogue on Plastic Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (IDP) seeks to explore how enhanced cooperation in the WTO could contribute to global, regional and domestic efforts reduce plastics pollution and promote the transition to more environmentally sustainable trade in plastics. IDP has 72 WTO co-sponsors, representing 75% of plastics trade. Coordinators of the initiative are Australia, Barbados, China, Ecuador, Fiji and Morocco.

Launched during the "WTO Trade and Environment Week 2020", hosted around the Fall meeting of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment, the IDP group has sought to identify the linkages between trade and plastic pollution and the potential for trade action to support efforts to address it. Among the illuminating data discussed in the first year is:

- Annual trade in plastics accounts for about 5 % of global trade – or more than 1 trillion US dollars in 2019 – almost 40% higher than previously estimated, with more "hidden flows" of plastics unaccounted for (e.g. plastics embedded in traded goods not classified as plastics);
- It amounts to 336 million metric tonnes of plastic, crossing borders multiple times along plastics' life cycle, from primary form to intermediate and final goods and waste;
- Only 2% of plastics trade is in waste form, with most trade happening upstream;
- WTO Members have already notified more than 130 trade measures to address plastic pollution (e.g. bans on non-biodegradable plastic bags, straws and cotton buds, import licenses and quotas on plastic wastes), 80% by developing members and LDCs.

In December 2021 a [Ministerial Statement](#) was adopted, expressing Ministers' shared understandings on the topic and charting their work towards concrete, pragmatic, and effective outcomes by MC13. The Statement lays out some key areas in which the Dialogue will focus, including: how to improve transparency of plastic trade flows, supply chains and trade policies; strengthening regulatory cooperation with other international bodies – in particular the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) negotiations towards a new international agreement by 2024 to end plastic pollution, WCO HS plastics classification reform and efforts under the BRS Conventions; identifying environmentally sustainable trade policies and mechanisms; and strengthening trade-related technical assistance for vulnerable economies, including LDCs and SIDS.

Three workstreams were created by the [IDP 2022 Plan](#) adopted in February 2022 to move technical work forward: cross-cutting issues (e.g. transparency, technical assistance); promoting trade to tackle plastic pollution (e.g. waste management technologies, plastic substitutes); and reduction to tackle plastic pollution and circular economy for plastics. The initiative's inclusive approach involves stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, international organizations and academia who support discussions through technical expertise, experience and transparency.

Early harvests announced at the press briefing:

A number of steps to implement the Ministerial Statement have been agreed upon by the group and would be presented at MC12. Notably, early harvests include:

- (i) a communication on enhanced cooperation with the WCO on plastics flows identification,
- (ii) a survey of trade-related measures relevant to plastic pollution reduction,
- (iii) a survey for assessing plastic-related Aid for Trade needs, and
- (iv) an exploratory workshop in collaboration with UNCTAD and other relevant stakeholders on plastics substitutes and alternatives in the second quarter of 2022

The coordinators will emphasize the initiative's objective to contribute to efforts in other fora. The next steps announced are part of the trade expertise contribution the initiative seeks to provide to these processes. [*the WTO Secretariat was invited by UNEP and shared its trade expertise and developments in the IDP at the first meeting of the UNEA process in Dakar, Senegal at the end of May*]

IDP Factbox

Coordinators: Australia, Barbados, China, Ecuador, Fiji and Morocco

Co-sponsors: 72 Members, representing more than 75% of global plastics trade

Albania; Angola; Australia; Austria; Barbados; Belgium; Bolivia, Plurinational State of; Bulgaria; Cabo Verde; Cambodia; Cameroon; Canada; Central African Republic; Chad; Chile; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Ecuador; Estonia; European Union; Fiji; Finland; France; Gambia; Germany; Greece; Honduras; Hong Kong, China; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Jamaica; Japan; Kazakhstan; Korea, Republic of; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macao, China; Maldives; Malta; Morocco; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of; Singapore; Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; Suriname; Sweden; Switzerland; Thailand; Tonga; United Kingdom; Uruguay; Vanuatu.

Key documents and resources

IDP Ministerial Statement, 10 December 2021 – [WT/MIN\(21\)/8/Rev.2](#)

IDP 2022 Plan – [INF/TE/IDP/W/5](#)

Communication to the WCO – [INF/TE/IDP/W/6/Rev.1](#)

Survey of trade-related plastic measures – [INF/TE/IDP/W/7/Rev.1](#)

Survey on plastic-related Aid for Trade needs – [INF/TE/IDP/W/8/Rev.1](#)

IDP website: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/ppesp_e/ppesp_e.htm