

Presentation by UN Environment / Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia

Jerker Tamelander, Interim Coordinator, COBSEA, tamelander@un.org

- First of all, apologies for not being there in person. This week we are convening the Asia Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment here in Bangkok. Pollution is a central theme, and we are holding a Special Session on Regional Ocean Governance and Marine Litter this Friday.
- I appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the East Asia Summit Conference on Combating Marine Plastic Debris, on behalf of COBSEA and UN Environment.
- COBSEA, as many of you will know, is a regional intergovernmental mechanism for governance and sustainable development of the marine environment, bringing together Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- As a Regional Seas programme, COBSEA supports planning, monitoring and reporting on ocean-related SDGs, in line with Resolution 10 of the second UN Environment Assembly. This means that objectives and activities are aligned with relevant SDGs and targets, foremost SDG 14.
- Specifically in relation to target 14.1 on pollution, it should be noted that East Asian Seas countries are, by some estimates, the largest source of marine litter in the world. The region is the main driver behind the growth in plastic production over recent decades, and also leads the growth in plastic consumption, while management of plastic waste remains relatively weak.
- Based on global and regional assessments carried out by UN Environment and the Regional Seas a decade ago, COBSEA countries developed and adopted a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter already in 2008.
- Until now this remains the only intergovernmental framework for action to combat marine litter in this region, and it is clear it is needed now as much as when it was formulated.
- In this brief presentation I want to make three main points. The first is that marine litter is a complex problem, but it can be solved.
 - In a matter of only decades plastic litter has become pervasive in all marine areas of the world. Because plastic is difficult to remove once it has reached the marine environment, we are likely to see significant impacts for some time to come.
 - Much attention is, appropriately, given to removal and clean-ups, but the lasting solutions to the problem are mainly upstream.
 - There is by now a large, and growing, knowledge base on marine litter, including many analyses prepared by UN Environment, in relation to environmental and economic impacts, particularly problematic polymers and compounds, waste flow, new materials etc., and monitoring and reporting is improving.
 - By accurately diagnosing the problem, and finding and addressing key points of intervention, the rate at which plastic and other waste ends up in the sea can be significantly reduced.
- The second issue I want to emphasize is that no single action is sufficient, we need a range of responses, and change across the board.

- This includes change in terms of human behaviour, consumption and production patterns, product and material development, recycling and waste management, etc.
 - Campaigns such as Clean Seas, which was launched together with Indonesia in Bali in February this year, can contribute to raising awareness and encouraging action.
 - But policy and regulations, including economic incentives, also have to evolve. This may address waste management and recycling practices, material recyclability, specific polymers and compounds, emission norms, and so on.
 - In this regard, to support policy and governance actions, UN Environment is preparing an analysis of global and regional governance mechanisms and policy instruments, which will be presented to the 3rd UN Environment Assembly later this year.
 - I would also be remiss if I did not mention the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, established by UN Environment and partners in 2014 to catalyse and support efforts at global, regional and national level.
- This brings me to the third point I wanted to make, which is that the regional dimension is crucially important.
 - COBSEA countries are increasingly scaling up efforts, including through their engagement in the Clean Seas campaign as well as through voluntary commitments in the context of the SDG 14 pollution target announced at the Ocean Conference in June this year.
 - Regional coherence among strategies, policies and actions are the basis for greater impact. It contributes to more effective delivery, and reduces the risk that efforts made in one location are undermined by lack of action in another. It also provides a clearer regulatory environment for businesses.
 - We have therefore initiated a process for the review and revision of the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, so as to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
 - A regional review of marine litter in East Asian Seas will provide a foundation for this, looking at status and trends, current regional and national policy frameworks, their effectiveness and gaps. The main emphasis will be on providing scientific knowledge and information to support evidence-based policies, effective implementation, as well as reporting on the state of the environment and SDGs.
 - COBSEA and UN Environment have also initiated development of a regional initiative towards addressing marine litter in the region, working across sectors and with a particular focus on addressing the management of the plastic value chain.
 - Stakeholder consultation on these activities is starting, and we welcome broad engagement from government as well as civil society and the private sector - all of which need to be part of the solution.
 - I am of course available to provide additional information on this, and welcome your feedback.
 - I also hope to meet many of you in person during the 4th Intergovernmental Review of the Global Programme of Action on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution, which will be held in Bali in October, and perhaps at the 3rd UN Environment Assembly in December this year.
 - Thank you again for providing this opportunity to address the East Asia Summit Conference on Combating Marine Plastic Debris.