PO Box 240, Apia, Samoa
E: sprep@sprep.org
T: +685 21929
F: +685 20231
W: www.sprep.org

The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

The Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the UNGA's report. Components of marine debris, particularly plastics and microplastics, constitute a major hazard to both marine biodiversity and transport in the Pacific Islands region. SPREP is actively engaged in a number of operational areas.

SPREP has recently analysed over 10,000 reports, spanning over 10 years of information from observers onboard purse seine and longline vessels within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of 18 Pacific island countries and territories, and in international waters in the Pacific Islands. The report prepared from these analyses[1] was provided to the Technical and Compliance Committee of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission in September 2015. It provides the first consistent and substantive documented evidence of the nature and extent of ocean-based marine pollution from fishing vessels in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. Besides the threats posed to marine wildlife from indiscriminate dumping of waste, the disposal of items such as rope and netting also presents a serious hazard to navigation.

69% of the reported pollution incidents related to Waste Dumped Overboard; 18% to Oil Spillages and Leakages; and 13% to Abandoned, Lost, or Discarded Fishing Gear. When the category "Waste Dumped" was examined further, Plastics were found to make up the largest portion of total pollution incidents (36%).

While based on limited data, (the observer coverage was overwhelmingly biased towards purse seine vessels which are all required to carry observers and take approximately 90% of the tuna catch but constitute roughly only 10% of the fishing vessels active in the region), the report finds evidence that pollution from fishing vessels in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean is a serious problem.

The SPREP report highlights the need for three initiatives: 1) increased monitoring, reporting, and enforcement of pollution violations by all types of fishing vessels, especially longliners, which currently have a very low (5%) mandatory observer coverage, (which itself is rarely attained); 2) a regional outreach and compliance assistance programme on marine pollution prevention for fishing vessel crews, business operators and managers; and 3) improvements in Pacific port waste reception facilities to enable them to receive fishing vessel wastes on shore.

SPREP is also co-sponsoring a study on the provenance and distribution of plastics in fish and other marine organisms in the Pacific Islands. A comprehensive literature survey has been completed, and sampling of fish digestive systems has been undertaken for the presence of marine plastic debris and

[1] Marine pollution originating from purse seine and longline fishing vessel operations in the Western and Central Pacific region, 2003-2015. WCPFC-TCC11-2015-OP06 24Sept 2015

microplastic particles in Samoa, with further sampling about to be undertaken in French Polynesia. Plastic particles have been identified in at least four fish species.

SPREP acknowledges the constructive role that has been played by SPC in addressing the issues of marine debris in the region. Like SPC, SPREP is very concerned about the potential for Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) to entangle and kill threatened species such as turtles and sharks. The recent SPREP study reported numerous examples of vessels returning to FADs they had deployed, removing valuable electronic equipment, and then releasing rather than retrieving the FAD, leaving it to drift as Abandoned, Discarded or Lost Fishing Gear. SPREP supports, and may participate in, the FAO conference on the marking of fishing gear, scheduled for April 2016.

Other initiatives taken by SPREP to address the hazards of marine debris include:

Collaborating with the International Whaling Commission in training programmes to disentangle whales enmeshed in netting, rope and other debris;

Deploying litter booms (e.g. Samoa and Solomon Islands) to collect debris in waterways before it reaches the sea;

Collaborating with UNEP as the regional Focal Point for the Global Marine Litter Initiative;

Coordinating community clean-ups of beaches and waterways:

In 2015, SPREP, in association with the Ocean Conservancy, organized coastal cleanup days in 7 countries. An expert analysis was conducted, which assigned scores for entanglement, ingestions and contamination on a shortlist of items culled from 30 years of data from Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup. The study found that a wide variety of items were collected that pose threats to marine wildlife through entanglement, ingestion, or contamination, suggesting that a comprehensive approach to preventing plastics from entering the ocean is vitally needed. Among the items, abandoned and lost fishing gear including nets, fishing line and buoys, were found to pose the greatest overall threat to marine wildlife, primarily because of entanglement. Plastic bags emerged as the second most harmful item as they are often confused for food by marine mammals. Smaller items like balloons were also found to be harmful.