

SUMMARY

Viet Nam and the Issue of Marine Debris, Plastics and Microplastics

1. Challenges posed by marine debris, plastics and microplastics

- Marine debris, plastic and microplastics debris are considered some of the biggest global challenges in the 21st century.
- They harm marine wildlife and human health as well as destroying the marine environment.
- They are also found to cause economic damages to coastal states in terms of fishery, maritime transportation and tourism industries, as well as increasing coastal clean-up operations.

2. Actions at the national and regional levels

- Viet Nam's development of plastic waste collecting system along with landfill management has helped reduce the quantities of solid wastes dumped into the oceans.
- Performing its duties under international conventions, Viet Nam has adopted legal documents regarding environment protection and management policies, including: (i) The Law of Environment Protection 2014, entering into force on 01 July 2016; (ii) Decree No. 38/2015/NĐ-CP on the control of wastes, entering into force on 15 June 2016.
- Viet Nam has actively participated in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and other multilateral and intergovernmental forum on the protection of marine environment and the prevention and reducing of marine debris.
- Viet Nam has launched shorelines clean-up operations in coastal areas and propagated information to local residents and tourists to raise the public awareness of environment protection.

3. Recommendations to prevent and reduce marine debris, plastics and microplastics

- Strengthen international cooperation in knowledge and information sharing regarding transboundary issues of marine debris pollution.
- Enhance the management capacity and improve policy-making mechanism regarding marine debris control.
- Enhance research capacity on the issue of marine debris including factual analysis, trends of marine debris pollution and its impacts on marine life and ecosystem in different perspectives.
- Increase public awareness, among manufacturers, goods distributors, consumers and others about marine debris.
- Promote investment in infrastructure development to control, produce statistics, categorize marine debris and land-based wastes and to build waste processing and recycling systems.
- Assist developing countries to draw comprehensive solutions and improve its management capacity as well as to develop domestic legal documents in order to effectively implement the Basel Convention and the MARPOL Convention./.

COUNTRY REPORT

Viet Nam and the Issue of Marine Debris, Plastics and Microplastics

1. Challenges posed by marine debris, plastics and microplastics

Plastic is a synthetic material originated from petrochemicals. It is used as material in a wide range of industries including textile and garment, packaging, household, electricity and water supplies as well as automobile and aircraft building. Statistics show that only one third of plastic materials is recovered for recycling or reuse. Most of which was dumped into the sea and ocean, becoming one of the main types of marine debris. In 2015, scientists pointed out that there are up to 8 to 9 million tons of solid wastes entering into the marine environment each year, in which around 80% originate from land-based resources and 20% from ocean-based resources. It is also noted that 90% of marine debris are plastic and it could take more than 400 years for them to decompose or biodegrade.

Being considered one of the biggest global challenges in the 21st century, together with climate change, ocean acidification and biodiversity loss, plastic marine debris harms marine wildlife and human health. Studies have shown that more than 200 different marine species have suffered from entanglement. Many animals have been known to accidentally ingest plastic debris, leading to choking, physical blockage, malnutrition, and even death.

Microplastics which are the result of larger pieces of plastic breaking down into smaller ones, including originally manufactured products found in textiles or cosmetics and personal care products, etc, are difficult to find and recover. When floating on the ocean for a certain time, they are found deposited at the seafloor and thus restrain the respiration of sediment and animals living there, leading to oxygen deprivation and death. Furthermore, microscopic fragments of plastic are also found in the ingestion system of zooplankton or organisms. The effect of such consumption could possibly reach out to other species and human through food chain.

Plastic debris usually contain toxic chemicals including non-flammable compounds and Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), etc, which have negative effects on the marine and coastal environment as well as human health. Globally, it is estimated that plastic debris causes an annual damage of 13 billions USD to fishery, maritime transportation and tourism industries, as well as coastal clean-up operations (UNEP, 2014).

2. Actions at the national and regional levels

- In Viet Nam, the collection rate of plastic waste in urban areas is considerably high (over 80%). However, in rural areas, where more than two third of the population resides, such rate remains limited (from 40 to 60%). The development of plastic waste collecting system along with landfill management in such areas certainly helps reducing the quantities of solid wastes disposed into rivers and then ended up in the sea.

- In 1995, Viet Nam acceded to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal 1989 (the Basel Convention) and the Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973 (MARPOL

Convention). To fully implement those conventions, Viet Nam has been improving its institutional frameworks and policies regarding environment protection by developing and adopting legal documents including the Law of Environment Protection 2014, Decree No. 38/2015/NĐ-CP on the control of wastes. Especially, the Law on Marine Resources and Environment and Islands adopted in 2015, entering into force on 01 July 2016, will provide a legal framework for the overall management of marine resources and environment. These documents form a legal basis for the improvement of marine environment protection in general and the control of marine pollution caused by marine debris, plastics and microplastics in particular.

Viet Nam wholeheartedly supports the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and pledges to do her best to ensure its successful implementation, including Goal 14 which requires States to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds. Furthermore, the Vietnamese Government has been actively participating in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and other multilateral and intergovernmental forum on the protection of marine environment and the prevention and reducing of marine debris.

- The local authorities in coastal provinces of Viet Nam, especially those with marine conservation areas and world natural heritage sites, have launched many annual shorelines clean-up operations and information disseminations for local residents as well as tourists to raise the public awareness of environment protection.

3. Recommendations to prevent and reduce marine debris, plastics and microplastics

To prevent and reduce the marine debris problems, Viet Nam suggests that States should:

- Enhance the management capacity and improve the policy-making mechanism regarding marine debris control.

- Enhance the research capacity on the issue of marine debris including factual analysis, trends of marine debris pollution and its impacts on marine life and ecosystem in different perspectives.

- Further develop science and technologies to better monitor wastes, prevent and reduce marine debris.

- Increase public awareness, among manufacturers, goods distributors, consumers and others about marine debris.

- Strengthen international cooperation in knowledge and information sharing regarding transboundary issues of marine debris pollution.

In addition, Viet Nam proposes that the UN Development Program and developed countries provide assistance to developing and less-developed countries with regard to:

- Promoting investment in infrastructure development to control, produce statistics, categorize marine debris and land-based wastes and to build waste processing and recycling systems.

- Assisting Viet Nam to draw comprehensive solutions and improve its management capacity as well as to develop domestic legal documents in order to effectively implement the Basel Convention and the MARPOL Convention./.