

Ocean Nexus Recommendations For UN Plastics Negotiations

About Ocean Nexus

At Ocean Nexus, our mission is to establish social equity at the center of ocean governance. Ocean Nexus is one of the world's leading institutions for equitable ocean policy research, including the topic of marine plastic pollution. We are a partnership of academic researchers and marine governance practitioners from 25 countries and 45 institutions and civil society groups.

The Issue

Marine plastic pollution (MPP) is an equity issue. The impacts of MPP is often inequitably experienced by historically-marginalized communities who are most vulnerable. Moreover, policies and management actions intended to mitigate plastic pollution have in some cases exacerbated existing systemic inequities and colonial legacies.

Equity & Marine Plastic Pollution Report Summary

The [Ocean Nexus Equity and Marine Plastic Report](#) presents comprehensive research findings of current forms of marine plastic pollution impacts and its governance. Groundbreaking in its scope and social science approach, the report thoughtfully weaves together the multidisciplinary expertise of 31 Ocean Nexus scholars representing the fields of Environmental Law and Policy, Public Health, Marine Toxicology, and Critical Social Sciences.

The report examines the complexities of inequitable marine plastic pollution burdens, emphasizing that MPP is not a problem that can be solved solely through end-of-life actions (i.e., improved waste management, increased recycling rates and behavior change of the public).

Findings from the report illustrate major equity issues across the themes of responsibility, knowledge, well-being, and coordination. Across each thematic domain we present key governance actions necessary to address processes that drive and exacerbate ongoing inequities.

8 Recommendations for the UN Plastics Negotiations

The Ocean Nexus Equity and Marine Plastic Pollution Report presents the 8 key action recommendations to address and reverse the inequities stemming from marine plastic pollution and associated governance. We present a summary of key actions on the following pages.

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Summary of 8 Key Actions

Ocean Nexus Equity and Marine Plastic Pollution Report

- 1**
Refocus Responsibility Onto the Root Cause of the Problem: Plastic Production

Industry has shaped the discourse defining the plastics crisis as an individualized problem, deflecting attention away from the responsibilities of industry while also distracting from the structural inequalities of plastic waste burdens.

End-of-life approaches are symptom-focused, deflecting attention away from the root cause of the plastics crisis—the production of toxic and wasteful plastics.
- 2**
Recognize Industry Creates Responsibility “Scapegoats” to Deflect Blame

Taking control of the plastics waste narrative dampens criticism of big business and shifts blame from industry onto less powerful actors outside their supply chains, creating “scapegoats” for the plastics crisis.

Responsibility “scapegoats” serve as distractions from the continuing efforts of big business to avoid responsibilities or derail regulatory actions.
- 3**
Limit Industry Influence Over Knowledge Production and Plastics Discourse

Powerful industry groups have shaped the dominant discourse defining the plastics crisis as an individualized problem, deflecting attention away from the responsibilities of plastics producers and manufacturers as the biggest polluters and those with the most power to make the most change at source, while also distracting attention away from the structural inequalities of plastic waste burdens.
- 4**
Recognize and Value Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Governance and Management

The exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems from the dominant discourses on plastic waste governance has led to socio-environmental injustices that perpetuate harmful colonial and capitalist ideologies and agendas.

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- 5**
Prioritize Community Voices in Understanding Impacts of Marine Plastic Pollution
- A well-being approach recognizes that human health is more than the absence of disease and includes environmental, social, biological, psychological, economic, and political attributes.
- A well-being approach is critical to understanding the range of direct and indirect impacts that stem from marine plastic pollution.
- 6**
Acknowledge That There is a Diversity of Voices, Values and Needs
- A well-being approach contributes to more equitable modes of impact assessment that acknowledges the diversity of needs and values that occur across different communities.
- A well-being approach recognizes diversity as critical to avoiding further marginalization related to race, age, class, citizenship, gender and other factors.
- 7**
Stop the Ongoing Displacement of Plastic Waste Through the Global Waste Trade
- Despite the Basel Convention, waste continues to flow from high income to low income nations perpetuating unequal plastic waste burdens.
- 8**
Address Balloon Effects of Uncoordinated Plastic Production Restrictions
- Plastic production restrictions in one country have resulted in focused efforts by industry to increase production in countries that may not have the capacity to regulate production.
- Fragmented regulations thus produce “balloon effects” where squeezing out plastics production in one country leads to the inflation of production in others.

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Roadmap and Remediation

In our forthcoming *Equity and Marine Plastic Pollution Roadmap*, Ocean Nexus stands ready to support:

1. **Capacity strengthening** for better representation of actors most affected by marine plastic pollution
2. **Principle for an international treaty** that is equitable and enforceable
3. **Determining rigorous definitions** as the basis for regulation
4. **Establishing corporate accountability** and responsibility of Equitable Outcomes.

We have also initiated our multi-year research on Remediation, including **the applications of extended producers' responsibility**, the critical dimension, and **the inequitable treatment of the informal sector**.

We are extremely concerned that there are clear gaps in the representation of their voices in the reform of the workforce and the lack of a transformative perspective to formalize the sector to stop continuous exploitation.