Date: 22.11.2022

SNEPT Statement for the First Meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution

About SNEPT

The Scientists' Network for an Effective Plastics Treaty (SNEPT) is an international and multidisciplinary network of scientists working on plastics pollution. The network was formed around the Scientists' Declaration on the Need for Governance of Plastics Throughout their Lifecycles, that was signed by 504 scientists and represents a consensus of the scientific community on plastics pollution. During the negotiations on the UN Plastics Treaty, SNEPT offers to provide pertinent, robust and independent scientific knowledge and perspectives to the delegates, member states and UNEP. SNEPT currently has 128 members across 35 countries, and promotes geographical, disciplinary, cultural and gender diversities within its membership. All members provide documentation of their qualifications, independence and absence of conflicts of interests.

For the integration of scientific evidence into the negotiations, we suggest three guiding principles:

A global agreement must be based on multi-disciplinary knowledge

Addressing plastic pollution will require considerations of fossil-based and biobased feedstocks for plastic production, chemicals in plastics, product design, supply- and value-chains, trade and markets, environmental impacts and trade-offs, including environmental and human health effects, socio-economic costs, social and environmental justice and equity. The broad scope of the science required to inform an effective treaty challenges the idea that a small number of experts can holistically and accurately represent the full body of scientific knowledge. SNEPT, therefore, relies on expert groups from a wide range of disciplines and expertise and is structured to identify and evaluate the sources, pathways, fates, and impacts of plastic pollution, and to assess evidence-based solutions. These groups will be competent, agile, and responsive to negotiators' needs for rapid scientific input.

A global agreement must be based on robust science

The knowledge base for the negotiations should be robust, that is, based on the scientific method (systematic observations and hypotheses, testing, transparent reporting, validation by peers, reproducibility of findings), such that it represents the state of the science in a comprehensive and unbiased way. Scientific documents procured by the INC Secretariat for the negotiations, in the form of reports and draft documents on the scientific status, should therefore be open for peer review prior to submission to the INC. These documents should aim to represent the current scientific consensus on specific aspects of plastic pollution; collect and summarise evidence (e.g., by systematic literature mapping, peer-review); and quantify uncertainties in knowledge while also providing explanatory analyses of those uncertainties within the context of the prevention, precautionary and polluter-pays principles.

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A global agreement must be based on independent science

For a global agreement to be effective and just, it needs to be built on independent science free from conflicts of interests. Thus, to ensure integrity, there needs to be a clear conflicts-of-interest policy for scientific consultants feeding scientific knowledge into the INC and the intersessional periods.

Finally, SNEPT sees the need to establish a credible and agile scientific body to provide pertinent, robust, and independent scientific input to the plastic treaty negotiations. This must include environmental and socio-economic evidence and guidance in a democratic, transparent and open manner, to ensure the human right to science and freedom of information. Such a scientific body should also ensure that local and traditional knowledge, innovations and practices are considered, scrutinised, and shared with prior informed consent. This scientific body could be incorporated under a future science-policy panel on chemical pollution and waste, or as a separate dedicated scientific group under the plastic treaty. SNEPT considers it important to establish an interim, ad-hoc body to be established during the negotiations, to ensure that the INC process is informed by the best available science now, rather than waiting until a panel is established post-2024.

SNEPT therefore reiterates the following points relating to the point of discussion during INC-1 on how the process could be structured in order to reach agreement by the end of 2024:

- The INC process needs the involvement of independent scientists with diverse, multi-disciplinary expertise to provide a robust knowledge base that reflects the current state of the science and represents consensus in the scientific community.
- To achieve this, scientific input must be a) inclusive in terms of disciplinary, cultural and gender backgrounds, b) robust in terms of providing critical assessments of the evidence, and c) independent of conflicts of interest.

In the forthcoming negotiations, SNEPT specifically sees the need for scientists' involvement in:

- Definitions of technical terms
- Interpretations and applications of key terms
- Open peer review of scientific background documents to the INC, such as UNEP/PP/INC.1/7 and the forthcoming Spotlight report
- Presentations and workshops on scientific issues for capacity building of delegates
- Ad-hoc responses to delegations on scientific topics
- Assessment of the state of the science on specific topics
- Assistance in drafting and peer review of INC documents
- Assessment of the effectiveness and trade-offs of potential solutions
- Development of approaches to monitor the efficacy of interventions
- Understanding of the plastic mass balances related to sources, sinks and pathways
- Developing and assessing indicators and action plans

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Non-exhaustive list of scientific expertise in SNEPT

1) Feedstock
2) Polymer chemistry and material design
3) Presence and fate of plastic pollution (i.e., macro-, meso-, micro-, nanoplastics), and plastic chemicals, in natural environments, including water, air, soil, sediments, and biota
4) Polymer degradation
5) Environmental impacts of plastic pollution (i.e., macro-, meso-, micro-, nanoplastics), including chemicals in plastics
6) Human health impacts of plastics, including those from chemicals in plastic
7) Ecological and biogeochemical impacts of plastic pollution (i.e., macro-, meso-, micro-, nanoplastics), including those from chemicals in plastic
8) Societal impacts of plastic pollution (i.e., macro-, meso-, micro-, nanoplastics)
9) Development and assessment of solutions
10) Political science and policy

For more information on SNEPT please contact the SNEPT Secretariat at scientists.plasticstreaty@gmail.com.