

Systemic change to the entire plastics economy is needed to halt ocean plastic pollution

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That's the overwhelming message from a new United Nations report, which says to reduce the amount of plastic entering the ocean, we must reduce the amount of plastic in the system, and that fragmented and piecemeal actions and policies are contributing to the global ocean plastic problem.

The report, from the International Resource Panel (IRP), lays out the many and complex challenges stopping the planet from reaching the ambition of global net zero marine [plastic pollution](#) by 2050. It makes a series of urgent proposals which are particularly critical at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to the increase of plastic [waste](#).

The report, led by researchers from the University of Portsmouth, has been published today at an event hosted by the Government of Japan. This report was commissioned by the G20 to assess policy options to deliver the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision. Its mission—to reduce additional marine plastic litter entering the ocean to zero by 2050.

According to The Pew Charitable Trusts and SYSTEMIQ report [Breaking the Plastic Wave](#) the annual discharge of plastic into the [ocean](#) is estimated to be 11 million metric tons. The latest modeling indicates that current government and industry commitments will only reduce marine plastic litter by 7% in 2040 compared to business as usual. Urgent and concerted action is needed in order to achieve systemic change.

Author of this new report and IRP Panel member Steve Fletcher, Professor of Ocean Policy and Economy and Director of Revolution Plastics at the University of Portsmouth said: "It's time to stop isolated changes where you have country after country doing random things that on the face of it are good but actually don't make any difference at all. Intentions are good but don't recognize that changing one part of the system in isolation doesn't magically change everything else."

Professor Fletcher explained: "A country might put in place recyclable plastics, but if there is no collection process, no recycling system in place and no market for the plastic to be used again and its cheaper to use virgin plastic then that recycled plastic is a total waste of time. It's a type of 'green washing' that looks good on the surface but has no meaningful impact. It's time to stop isolated changes where you have country after country doing random things that on the face of it are good but actually don't make any difference at all. Intentions are good but don't recognize that changing one part of the system in isolation doesn't magically change everything else."

The experts say they know their recommendations are probably the most demanding and ambitious yet, but warn that time is running out.

Other recommendations listed in the report:

- Change will only come about if policy targets are shaped on a global scale but rolled out nationally.
- Actions that are known to reduce marine plastic litter should be encouraged, shared and scaled up immediately. These include moving from linear to circular plastic production and consumption by designing out waste, incentivising reuse, and exploiting market-based instruments. These actions can generate 'quick wins' to inspire further [policy](#) action and provide a context that encourages innovation.
- Supporting innovation to transition to a circular plastics economy is essential. While many technical solutions are known and can be initiated today, these are insufficient to deliver the ambitious net-zero target. New approaches and innovations are needed.
- There is a significant knowledge gap in the effectiveness of marine plastic litter policies. An urgent and independent program to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of plastics policies is required in order to identify the most effective solutions in

different national and regional contexts.

- The international trade in plastic waste should be regulated to protect people and nature. Transboundary movement of waste plastics to countries with insufficient waste management infrastructure could result in significant plastic leakage to the natural environment. Global trade in [plastic](#) waste needs to be more transparent and better regulated.
- COVID-19 recovery stimulus packages have the potential to support the delivery of the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision.

More information: Policy Options to Eliminate Additional Marine Plastic Litter: [www.resourcepanel.org/reports/ ... arine-plastic-litter](http://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/...arine-plastic-litter)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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