

UN aims to deliver draft plastics treaty by year's end

June 3 2023, by Benjamin LEGENDRE



Plastic debris kills more than a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year.

The world should see the first draft of a highly anticipated and much needed international treaty to combat plastic pollution by the end of

November, 175 nations gathered in Paris decided Monday after five days of grueling talks.

The assembly's negotiating committee called for the preparation of the "zero-draft" of a "legally binding instrument" ahead of a third round of talks in Nairobi, with the aim of finalizing the treaty in 2024.

The decision emerged from an eleventh-hour meeting led by France and Brazil and was adopted by the full plenary at UNESCO's Paris headquarters.

"Are there are no more interventions on this point?" asked Peru's Gustavo Meza-Cuadra Velasquez, chair of the forum's Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee.

"It is so decided," he continued, as he brought down the gavel.

The breakthrough came after considerable "nit-picking" and "delaying tactics" by some countries, said France's minister for ecological transition, Christophe Bechu.

Frustrations bubbled up during the first two days of the talks, which were devoted entirely to a debate over procedural rules, as large plastics producer nations—including fossil fuel supplier Saudi Arabia, as well as China and India—resisted the idea the deal could be decided by a vote rather than by consensus.

On current trends, "by 2050 there will be more [plastic waste](#) than fish in the oceans," Mexican negotiator Camila Zepeda told AFP. "We can't get hung up on procedural rules."

Concern over the impact of plastics on the environment and human well-being has surged in recent years along with a crescendo of research

documenting its omnipresence and persistence.

In nature, microplastics have been found in ice near the North Pole and inside fish navigating the oceans' deepest, darkest recesses.

The equivalent of a garbage truck's worth of [plastic](#) refuse is dumped into the ocean every minute.

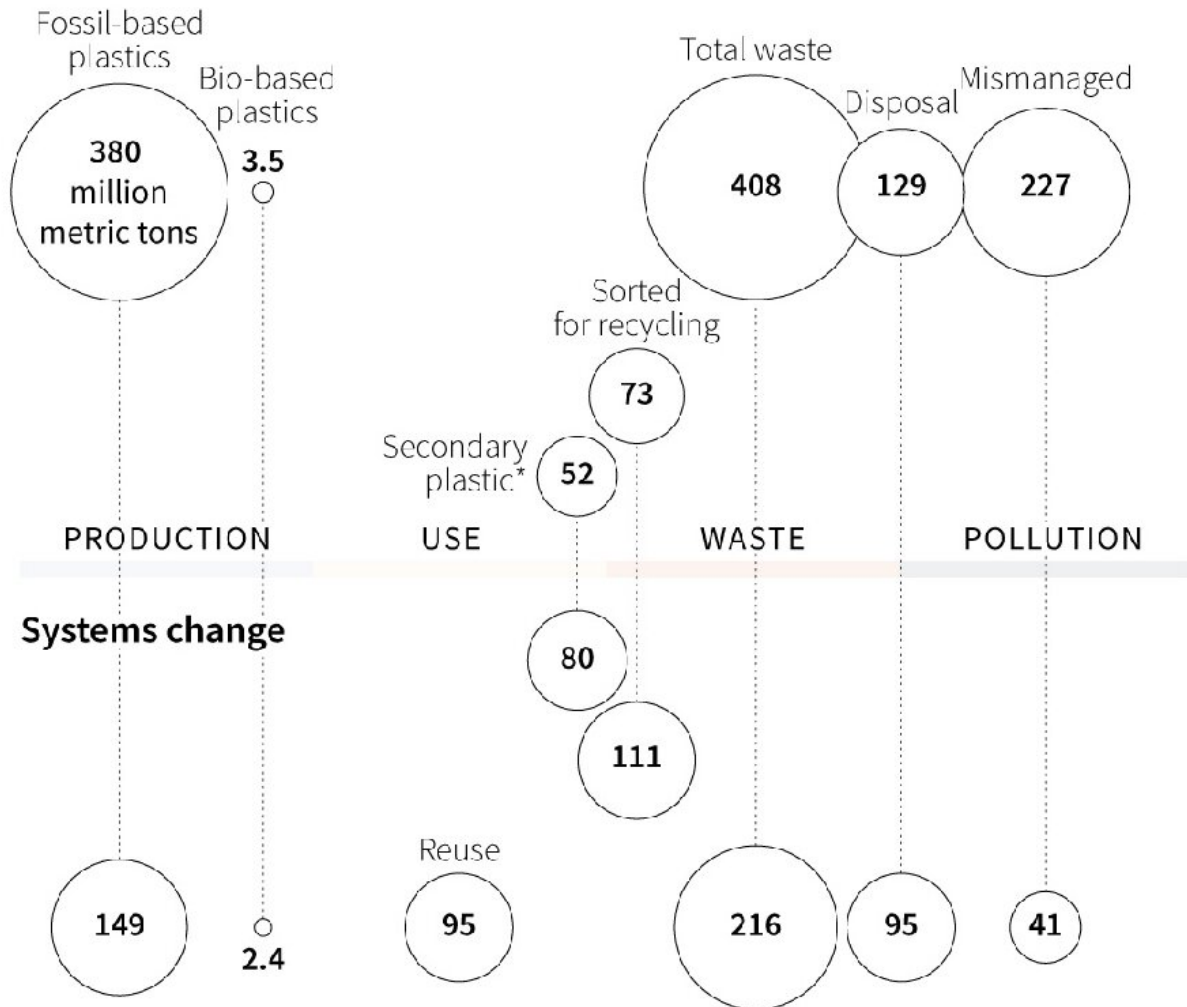
Plastic debris is estimated to kill more than a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year, according to the United Nations Environment Program.

Filter-feeding blue whales consume up to 10 million pieces of microplastic every day.

The future of plastics: two scenarios

Modelled short-lived plastic flows in 2040

Business-as-usual



*small particles that resulted from the fragmentation of larger plastic items
 Source: UNEP, model data based on OECD and Pew Charitable Trust



Two scenarios of modeled short-lived plastic flows.

In humans, microscopic bits of plastic have been detected in blood,

breast milk and placentas.

Green groups participating in the talks as observers had mixed reactions.

Eirik Lindebjerg, global plastics policy manager for WWF, hailed what he called "tangible progress."

Beyond recycling

"A large majority of the countries have expressed a need for binding specific obligations to end [plastic pollution](#)," he told AFP.

Others expressed concern about what is to come.

"It is clear from this week's negotiations that oil-producing countries and the fossil fuel industry will do everything in their power to weaken the treaty and delay the process," said Angelica Carballo Pago, global plastics media lead for Greenpeace U.S..

"There is still a huge amount of work ahead of us."

Beside its impact on the environment, plastic also drives [global warming](#), accounting for more than three percent of global emissions in 2019, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

On [current trends](#), annual production of fossil-fuel-based plastics will nearly triple by 2060 to 1.2 billion tons, while waste will exceed one billion tons.

With less than 10 percent recycled and more than a fifth dumped or burned illegally, [environmental groups](#) are pushing for the treaty to go beyond recycling.

"The world needs urgently an international plastic treaty, one that regulates production, one that addresses pollution from its very source," said Li Shuo of Greenpeace.

Dynamics between countries echoes those in international climate negotiations, where "big producer countries are on the defense", he told AFP, adding that producers want to focus on pollution and not cuts in how much plastic is made.

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