

International experts issue renewed call for Global Plastics Treaty to be grounded in robust science

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A letter from members of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty has been [published](#) in the journal *Science* days before the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) begins in Ottawa, Canada. With some discussions to focus on the mandate for—and then the designation and development of—a science body that will set goals and assessment criteria, the scientists say such a body should incorporate "a robust conflict of interest policy" to ensure unbiased, evidence-based decisions about the future of plastics.

With negotiations around the Global Plastics Treaty set to resume late April 2024, an international group of scientists has renewed calls for the ambitions and commitments of the Treaty to be driven by robust scientific evidence that is free from conflicts of interest.

Government officials from across the world, and around 4,000 observers representing different aspects in society will gather in Ottawa, Canada, from April 23 to 29 for the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4).

It will be the fourth of an expected five sessions convened to negotiate an international and legally binding global treaty after the mandate was signed by the 193 world leaders at the United Nations Environment Assembly in March 2022.

Part of the discussions to take place in Canada, will focus on the mandate for—and then the designation and development of—a science body that will set goals and assessment criteria, and monitor progress after the treaty has been signed.

Writing in the journal *Science*, four prominent members of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty have said such a body should incorporate "a robust conflict of interest policy" to ensure unbiased, evidence-based decisions about the future of plastics.

The Scientists' Coalition is a group of over 350 independent scientists from over 60 countries who have coalesced to support member states throughout the treaty negotiations by offering robust, scientific evidence.

They cite concerns over the number of fossil fuel and chemical lobbyists who have attended the negotiations so far, and recent recommendations to limit the treaty's goals to improved recycling and waste management rather than decreasing plastic production and consumption.

With the scale of global plastic pollution "hindering the human right to a clean and safe environment," and production still increasing rapidly, the scientists say the treaty should address the human and environmental health impacts of plastics.

Instead, they have urged negotiators to adopt and strengthen approaches that prohibit the production of groups of the most hazardous and unsustainable plastics chemicals, polymers, and products that have already been banned or restricted in other multilateral environmental agreements. They could subsequently broaden this to incorporate elements beyond the scope of existing agreements.

They have also called for the designation of a scientific body that is independent and supported by both a robust conflict of interest policy, and broad regional and multi-stakeholder representation, including Indigenous knowledge holders.

Professor Trisia Farrelly, Co-Director of the Political Ecology Research Center at Massey University (New Zealand), said, "Throughout the three

negotiating sessions thus far to develop a global plastics treaty, a growing number of scientists, civil society organization members, and member state delegates have been calling for a legally binding treaty based on trusted and independent science.

"To achieve that requires creating a science-policy interface as a subsidiary body under the future treaty with a robust conflict of interest policy, a wide range of relevant expertise, and equitable regional representation. Securing that will contribute significantly to the effective implementation of the treaty."

Tom Gammage, a marine social scientist based at James Cook University (Australia), said, "The singular opportunity to combat plastic pollution, as presented by the incoming global treaty, hinges on one critical factor: independent scientific guidance. In a landscape dominated by the intricate complexities of plastics and the relentless influence of fossil fuel and chemical industries, the imperative for a science-policy interface free from conflicts of interest cannot be overstated. It's not just essential—it's our best bet for a sustainable future."

Professor Bethanie Carney Almroth, Professor of Ecotoxicology at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden), said, "The scientific evidence is very clear, and current production of plastics is not sustainable. Production and use of thousands of hazardous chemicals in plastics is not sustainable and hinders circularity. Member states can rely on that robust, independent science to support adoption of ambitious and effective obligations in the future global plastics treaty. Science can also help us find paths forward to protect the human right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment."

Professor Richard Thompson OBE FRS, Head of the International Marine Litter Research Unit at the University of Plymouth (UK), said, "Scientific evidence of harm right along the plastic life cycle—from

material extraction to disposal—has helped bring a once in a planet opportunity to address the issue of plastic pollution via a legally binding global treaty.

"Scientific evidence will be just as critical to guiding the way forward. Progress towards safe, sustainable and equitable decision making urgently requires a clear mandate for a science-policy interface as a subsidiary body to the future [treaty](#)."

More information: Trisia Farrelly, Global plastics treaty needs trusted science, *Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1126/science.adp4264](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adp4264).
www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adp4264

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