



**CORAL TRIANGLE
INITIATIVE**
ON CORAL REEFS, FISHERIES
AND FOOD SECURITY



Press Release:

Coral Triangle Region Faces Escalating Plastic Pollution Crisis

Latest report by CTI-CFF and WWF calls for a regional strategy to urgently deal with the escalating global plastic crisis that continues to affect the Coral Triangle disproportionately.

31 August 2023 – The Coral Triangle – a region known for its unparalleled marine biodiversity – is estimated to produce a staggering 6.2 million tonnes of mismanaged plastic waste annually. This figure is likely to double by 2025 if countries adopt a business-as-usual approach, which would have severe impacts on human and ecosystem health, affecting key industries including fishing, aquaculture, tourism and shipping, which millions of coastal communities depend on for income, livelihoods, and food security.

Released today, the stocktake report **“Marine Plastic Pollution and Its Sources in the Coral Triangle”** is published by the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and the WWF Coral Triangle Programme, with the aim of identifying a regional strategy approach based on the report’s findings.

Most of Coral Triangle’s plastic waste that leaks into the ocean comes from land-based sources. Poor land-based waste management, lack of waste processing and weak recycling systems are compounded by a large influx of plastic waste – both legal and illegal – to the region from other countries. Lack of comprehensive regulations and law enforcement further worsen the problem. Meanwhile, demand for plastic continues to rise, leading to unabated production and consumption, especially for single-use plastic packaging.

“Analysis of the plastic pollution situation within the Coral Triangle reveals a highly intricate challenge that necessitates systemic change,” asserts Dr. Mohd Kushairi bin Mohd Rajuddin, Executive Director of CTI-CFF Regional Secretariat in Manado, North Sulawesi.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the issue, the CTI-CFF has embarked on a mission to develop scalable action programmes and management plans that protect marine ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, and foster sustainable livelihoods. The CTI-CFF’s Regional Plan of Action 2.0 outlines strategic measures and initiatives aimed at combating waste management and marine pollution across the Coral Triangle region, with particular emphasis on mitigating the threat posed by plastic waste to fisheries resources and endangered or threatened species.

“In brief, the stocktake confirms that marine plastic pollution is a complex problem with no one solution and that a systemic shift that addresses both upstream production and downstream management of waste is needed to prevent potentially between 2.2 million and 5.9 million tonnes of plastic from entering the ocean annually from the six Coral Triangle countries,” says Jackie Thomas, author of the report from WWF Coral Triangle Programme.

In a groundbreaking accord that acknowledges plastic pollution as a global crisis, the international community converged at the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2) in March 2022 and reached consensus on a novel treaty to address plastic pollution on a global scale. Among the 175 countries supporting UNEA 5.2 outcomes were the six Coral Triangle nations, who endorsed the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to finalize the treaty's development by the close of 2024.

"Seven key national recommendations have emerged from this plastic stocktake, encompassing the need for bolstered national-level policy and cross-sectoral coordination, adoption of circular economy and zero waste business models, and endorsement of the Global Plastic Treaty framework," says Kushairi.

The report documented at least 16 regional initiatives led by CTI-CFF's strategic partners and other regional stakeholders; at least 40 government-led initiatives at the national level across the Coral Triangle (as of 2021); and 10 case studies discussing challenges, opportunities and initiatives in Marine Protected Areas, urban coastal areas and in dealing with ghost fishing gear.

Recommendations stemming from this study highlight the critical need for stronger collaboration with academia, civil society, and the industrial sector. The cooperation mobilizes knowledge resources, building research, data collection and monitoring, and uses for advocating optimal solutions.

"Moreover, a focus on strengthening multilateral cooperation, such as participation in regional initiatives and facilitating information exchange through CTI-CFF working groups, is of utmost importance," Kushairi adds.

"Coastal and island communities often lack resources for alternatives to plastic or to manage plastic waste. With this stocktake, we hope that the Coral Triangle regional strategy will take into account the financial and human capacity needed to cope with escalating volumes of land and sea-based waste – across urban centres and remote islands," says Klaas Jan Teule, Leader of WWF's Coral Triangle Programme.

The expansion of fishing industries at the national, regional, and global levels, driven by the imperative of global food security, has left behind a wake of discarded fishing gear. Also known as ghost gear, this has inadvertently led to the demise of thousands of protected species, such as turtles, rare shark species, and marine mammals. Examples of initiatives undertaken by industry associations, communities, research organisations and NGOs to address the marine pollution resulting from the fishing sector have been included in the stocktake report. (*)

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Notes to Editor

The stocktake report “Marine Plastic Pollution and Its Sources in the Coral Triangle” is available for download from

<https://www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/library/marine-plastic-pollution-and-its-sources-coral-triangle>

Key factors contributing to the high plastic waste in the Coral Triangle include:

- Mismanaged waste; poor solid waste management; lack of infrastructure; and low rates of recycling;
- Lack of adequate legal and policy frameworks; poor enforcement;
- Lack of consistent data on plastic sources and leakage;
- Lack of financial and human capacity to cope with escalating volumes of land and sea-based waste;
- Unsustainable production and consumption with an increasing demand for plastics packaging and products;
- Vulnerable communities often lack resources for alternatives to plastic or to manage plastic waste;
- Large influx of plastic waste to South East Asian countries of the Coral Triangle from other countries (both legal and illegal); and
- Growth in global fisheries contributes abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear to the ocean;
- Recommendations from the study:

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REGIONAL LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The CTI-CFF Regional Secretariat is encouraged to:

-  **Engage with academia, NGOs, Strategic Partners and other regional governmental organizations** (e.g. ASEAN, COBSEA and SPREP) which have established partnerships with key resource and technical agencies to identify potential areas of collaboration such as but not limited to:
 - Sharing of knowledge and resources that can support the Coral Triangle countries implement national action plans to address marine litter and build circular economies
 - Develop a common research agenda for data collection and monitoring to address gaps in knowledge on plastics in the marine environment;
 - Support regional baseline and monitoring with standardized or comparable measures that include microplastics in the water-column, seabed and sub-soil and sensitive habitats;
 - Standardization of definitions for plastic products and biodegradability;
 - Harmonized policies and regulations i.e. Solid waste management, extended producer responsibility requirements.
 - Information sharing on Innovations and technology for circular economy and implementing the 5“R”s – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Return;
 - Innovating and scaling up environmentally sound alternatives to plastic;
 - Leveraging private sector and corporate compliance with commitments to sustainable consumption and production in packaging and plastics use;
 - Financial support and investment in managing plastic pollution;
 - Regional/global cooperation to stop illegal shipments of plastic waste to Coral Triangle countries.
-  **Build into the CTI-CFF 10 year capacity-building road map knowledge management and sharing of regional and local initiatives and solutions** that address marine plastic pollution to scale successful models, pilots and demonstration projects through the CTI-CFF networks and regional exchanges.
-  **Join the Global Ghost Gear Initiative** to facilitate knowledge sharing with the CTI, ICCS, CTM/PAS, TWG, LGN and WLF on best practices in preventing and addressing abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG).

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NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

-  Where necessary, **develop /adapt existing National Waste Management and Marine Litter Action Plans** to include circular economy approaches;
-  **Develop national level policy and investment plans** as part of solid waste management including improved collection, recycling, source segregation, and final disposal options;
-  **Reduce institutional fragmentation and strengthen legislation** to address upstream sources of waste and implement circular economy solutions;
-  Encourage **zero waste businesses models** that aim to replace plastic with reusable packaging or provide services that eliminate the need for plastics;
-  **Facilitate integration of local level government in the development and implementation of national plans and strategies** addressing marine plastic pollution and circular economy approaches in order to support coastal communities, MPA/MMA management groups and tourism centres deal with marine debris (and contribute to meeting effective management of 30% of marine areas by 2030);
-  **Encourage integration of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative's (GGGI) Best Practice Framework for the Management of Fishing Gear (BPF) and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear (VGMFG)** in national fisheries policies and regulations, where appropriate; and
-  Following UNEA Member States' adoption in February 2022 of Resolution UNEP/EA.5/Res.14, titled 'End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument', Coral Triangle countries are urged to **support and actively participate in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) processes** and ensure that the adopted treaty maintains the highest level of ambition with a transformative approach to addressing the full lifecycle of plastics to end plastic pollution.

About Coral Triangle

The Coral Triangle is the world's center of marine life, encompassing around 6 million sq km of ocean across six countries in Asia-Pacific - Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste. It is home to 76% of the world's known coral species, 37% of the world's coral reef fish species, and commercially valuable species such as tuna, whales, dolphins, rays, sharks, including 6 of the world's 7 known species of marine turtles.

About CTI-CFF

The CTI-CFF is a multilateral partnership established in 2009 of six countries working together to sustain biodiversity conservation and food security through the sustainable management of marine resources taking into consideration climate change impacts. The six CTI-CFF Member Countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste) focus on the conservation of coral reefs and their associated ecosystems within the Coral Triangle region.

The Regional Plan of Actions (RPOA) 2.0 provides an overview of CTI-CFF's strategic directions, goals and objectives and outlines CTI-CFF's key priorities/regional activities in striving to meet the needs of the member parties in an efficient and optimized manner. Visit our website for further information: www.coraltriangleinitiative.org