

Executive Summary

For Pacific Island Countries, the transboundary issue of marine debris, plastic and microplastics threatens the marine ecosystem functions that are integral to the economy, diverse cultures and food security of Pacific Islanders. Sources of greatest concern in the Pacific Islands region include land-based debris, and discards from both cargo and fishing vessels which constitute a serious hazard to both biodiversity and transport. With the potential emergence of the deep sea mining industry in the Pacific, microplastic debris associated with deep-sea sediments is becoming a pertinent topic. A key challenge for Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) is managing the impact from marine debris, plastic and microplastics without necessarily having control over the source. The estimated 80,000 or more Fish Aggregating Devices used in the Pacific tuna industry, which sometimes wash up on the reefs of Pacific countries, can impact on biodiversity, as well as livelihoods and subsistence of local communities, illustrating the potential burden to third parties of unretrieved fishing gear.

In the Pacific Islands region, a number of activities have been undertaken by regional organisations to address the issue of marine debris, plastic and microplastics.

Awareness raising activities include:

- coordination of community clean-ups of beaches and waterways by Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), in collaboration with the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, to raise awareness of the impacts of land-based sources of plastic and marine debris;
- submission of SPREP analysis on ocean-based marine pollution from fishing vessels to the Technical and Compliance Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC);
- a study co-sponsored by SPREP on the provenance and distribution of plastics and microplastics in fish and other marine organisms in the Pacific Islands; and
- a campaign by the Pacific Community (SPC) on the issue of discarding rubbish, especially plastics, when at sea.

SPREP has also deployed litter booms to collect debris in waterways and, in collaboration with the International Whaling Commission, delivered a training programme to promote the safe disentanglement of whales enmeshed in netting, rope and other debris.

Further actions recommended include:

- concerted efforts to address the issue of discarded Fish Aggregating Devices in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean through the WCPFC;
- adoption of mandatory requirements for marking fishing gear, to facilitate traceability through Regional Fisheries Management Organisations;
- investigation into the possible impacts of microplastic debris through environmental impact assessments for deep sea exploration and mining activities;
- investigation by the International Maritime Organization into the reduction and, if possible, elimination of lost shipping containers at sea; and
- awareness-raising activities to address the issues of discarded rubbish from small craft at sea, and land-based sources such as rubbish dumps and beaches.