

MEMO OF THE FIRST INFORMAL CONSULTATION WORKSHOP ON POLLUTION FROM  
PLASTIC PELLETS SPILLS FROM SHIPS  
(IC WS PLASTIC PELLETS 1-2024)

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The first informal consultation workshop on pollution from plastic pellets spills from ships (IC WS PLASTIC PELLETS 1-2024), hosted by Sweden, was held online on 6 February 2024.

The Workshop was attended by Delegations from Denmark, Estonia, EU, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Sweden and by Observers from the International Maritime Organization, KIMO International, OSPAR, The Pew Charitable Trust and WWF as well as invited guests from the PERMAGOV project. The List of Participants is contained in **Annex 1**.

Ms. Maja Högvik, Sweden, acted as moderator of the Session.

Ms. Marta Ruiz, Associate Professional Secretary, acted as secretary of the Workshop.

## Welcome and introduction to the structure of the workshop

The Workshop was welcomed by Ms. Maja Högvik, Sweden, who introduced the structure of the workshop.

The Workshop took note that the workshop focuses on action RS5 of the [Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter](#) which aims to “Investigate the problem caused by spills of plastic pellets from ships and, based on the findings, consider developing common guidelines for accident management in such events”.

The Workshop took note that the [implementation plan](#) of action RS5, as drafted by Sweden, lead of the action, foresees considering the results from a project on the topic (“[Acute Plastic Pollution: causes, problems and solutions](#)”) as well as IMO and EU related processes addressing plastic pellets to subsequently discuss whether there is a need for HELCOM countries to provide specific information to these processes, or HELCOM guideline or recommendation on the matter.

## Introduction of participants

The Workshop took note of a brief roundtable of introduction of workshop participants.

## The EU Commission proposal on a regulation on preventing microplastic pollution from plastic pellets

The Workshop took note of the information on the [EU Commission proposal](#) on a regulation on preventing microplastic pollution from plastic pellets as presented by Silvia Forni, DG ENV (**Presentation 1**). In particular, the Workshop noted that the possibility of including maritime transport in the proposal is being currently considered.

The Workshop welcomed the Commission proposal as well as the EU support to the IMO work on the topic.

The Workshop considered whether the proposal addresses all key aspects on plastic pellets identified during the drafting process, as well as the main challenges foreseen for countries in implementing it together with the possible support at regional level on its implementation, and noted the following views:

- economic operators managing smaller amounts than 5 tonnes per year should also be considered to be included in the scope of the regulation;
- the registration of EU and non-EU carriers is nationally costly and challenging;
- there are questions raised in relation to the partiality of the auditors and the inclusion of all sources in the proposal (e.g. tyre wear particles);
- the definition of plastic pellets needs to be very clear so that the proposal covers flakes and powder;

- ports (e.g. loading of pellets in the marine ports) are not included in the IMO draft circular<sup>1</sup>;
- it is important that HELCOM follows the process and supplements the parts that are not eventually covered by the regulation;
- the provisions should also address plastic pellets in the whole chain; and
- the issue of inclusion of the maritime transport is fundamental, alongside with the alignment with the work at IMO. Cooperation at national level is key;

The Workshop took note of the following clarifications:

- the two-years impact assessment conducted at EU level, which has not been conducted in OSPAR, was the basis for the scope of the proposal in relation to the companies that it covers. There are amendments under consideration in this regard; the Commission thinks that there is a need to keep some flexibility for SMEs, especially micro and small;
- the registration of EU carriers is obligatory. However, the notification of non-EU carriers is not included in the proposal;
- the certification as well as the accreditation of certifiers is addressed in Articles 5 and 7 of the proposal, respectively;
- the definition of plastic pellets aimed to be a wide one, this is why flakes and powders are not specifically mentioned. The Commission supports a broad definition of plastic pellets;
- the inclusion of maritime transport is challenging, however there is a commitment to support the work at IMO level. It is to be noted also that despite the incidents at sea, land-based sources of plastic pellet losses represent greater quantities than those at sea; and
- the [OSPAR recommendation](#) applies to the whole chain, and all businesses and sizes are addressed, whereas this is not the case for the EU proposal, where only larger companies are affected by the certification obligation. Within the EU proposal, there is an element of self-declaration for smaller businesses to mitigate impacts on them;
- the focus of this proposal is on pellets and other sources like tyres abrasion are addressed in other instruments; and
- the Commission confirmed that ports are included in the proposal (they are hotspots for pellet losses).

### [The IMO process on classification of plastic pellets and guidelines on best practice related to clean-up of plastic pellets](#)

The Workshop took note of the information on the IMO process on classification of plastic pellets and guidelines on best practice related to clean-up of plastic pellets as presented by Loukas Kontogiannis, IMO (**Presentation 2**). In particular, the Workshop noted that the aim is to address acute losses of plastic pellets from accidents or losses of containers on board. The current approach, contemplates a: (i) draft MEPC circular on recommendations for the carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers with recommendations for the carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers, addressing in particular packaging, notification and stowage, which is to be finalized at PPR<sup>2</sup> 11 (19-23 February 2024), with a view to approval by MEPC 81 in 2024; and (ii) the subsequent development of amendments to appropriate mandatory instruments, which could be informed by the experience gained from the implementation of the voluntary measures.

The Workshop took note of the clarification, in relation to the follow up of the implementation of the draft circular, that even though it is of a voluntary nature, willingness from the plastic producers and carriers to avoid losses is envisaged.

The Workshop took note that there is no IMO procedure established in connection with the reporting of the implementation of the draft circular due to its voluntary nature, and that Member States are to follow up on its implementation, which can be done at PPR 12.

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<sup>1</sup> Draft MEPC circular on recommendations for the carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers (Annex 9 of PPR 10/18/Add. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response.

The Workshop took note that the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea ([HNS Convention](#)) captures under its scope, among other issues, goods under the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code. Therefore, when the Convention enters into force, the IMDG code can be amended to include plastic pellets. However, it is to be noted that the IMDG codes consider normal conditions, not incidents. Therefore, the amendment of Appendix I of MARPOL Annex III to include plastic pellets as a “hazardous substance” may be considered.

The Workshop considered whether there is room at regional level to support IMO work addressing plastic pellets, and took note of the following suggestions:

- to further cooperate to contribute to the gathering of knowledge on evidence-based impact to support IMO work; and
- the contribution from the RSCs could be linked to the provision of monitoring mechanisms to the implementation of the draft circular, such as a pilot project jointly conducted by some ports.

The Workshop was of the view that the role of the Regional Seas Conventions (RSCs) is complicated due to the individual role of countries at IMO. In addition, it is a new topic for some countries.

In view of the “[Zero draft text of the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment](#)” as well as a [summary](#) of the next foreseen steps on the development of the global treaty, the Workshop discussed the inclusion of plastic pellets, flakes and powders in the future global instrument and emphasized the need for the treaty to be complementary to the ongoing work at IMO, since being IMO part of the UN system, the global treaty will apply to IMO. In addition, the future global instrument provides the mandatory line of thinking which is not currently provided at IMO level.

### “Acute Plastic Pollution: causes, problems and solutions”

The Workshop took note of the findings and recommendations from the report “[Acute Plastic Pollution: causes, problems and solutions](#)” as introduced by Arabelle Bentley, KIMO International (**Presentation 3**).

In discussing the recommendations and solutions proposed in the report, the Workshop supported those proposed at the regional level.

The Workshop further supported bringing forward the recommendations at international level to the IMO process as well as to the negotiations on the EU proposal.

The Workshop took note that “Guidelines on clean-up of plastic pellets from ship-source spills” (PPR 11/INF.16) as developed by the Correspondence Group established by PPR 10 are to be considered in the upcoming PPR 11.

The Workshop emphasized the need of knowing the magnitude of the problem in the Baltic Sea. In this regard, the difficulties of monitoring plastic pellets on the seabed are to be noted. The Workshop took note that a pilot testing of the plastic pellets monitoring in the Baltic Sea is being conducted, and that its outcomes are envisaged by February 2025.

### National experiences

Due to time constraints, the Workshop did not discuss national experiences.

### The OSPAR experience

The Workshop took note of the OSPAR experience in addressing plastic pellets as introduced by Morag Campbell, Scottish Government (**Presentation 4**).

The Workshop exchanged views on which would be the take home message from the OSPAR experience for HELCOM and highlighted the relevance of having a regional spill response protocol for plastic pollution at sea in place, for which the definition of plastic pellets as well as an acute plastic pollution incident is key. The Workshop suggested inviting the HELCOM Response Working Group to initiate discussions on the matter.

The Workshop stressed the importance of learning from the OSPAR's experience to avoid duplication of work, as well as a close follow up of the IMO work on this topic.

The Workshop took note that there are national considerations ongoing in relation to national responsibilities in case of a plastic pellets incident at sea. The Workshop was of the view that an exchange of information on this matter in the HELCOM framework would be desirable.

The Workshop considered how to increase interregional cooperation on this topic and took note that a joint position in relation to the global plastic treaty would be desirable.

### Wrapping up and Memo of the Workshop

The Workshop supported the next steps in relation to the implementation of action RS5:

- to follow the process of the pellets regulation, and supplements the parts that are not eventually covered by the regulation, nor in the IMO process (e.g. loading in the marine ports) or flakes and powders if they are not included in the definition of plastic pellets);
- to support the work at IMO by conducting activities contributing to the monitoring of the implementation of the voluntary guidelines, e.g. conducting pilot projects on the matter between ports;
- to contribute to the knowledge-based on the impact of pellets as well as on the gathering of information of the magnitude of the problem in the Baltic Sea;
- to share experiences in relation to clean-up technologies; and
- to assess the possibility of including plastic pellets as part of the ongoing HELCOM cooperation in case of a pollution incident.

The Workshop took note that the memo of the workshop will be submitted to the third informal consultation session on the Implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (IC RAP ML 3-2024, 22 March 2024) for consideration.

## Annex 1 List of participants

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