

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

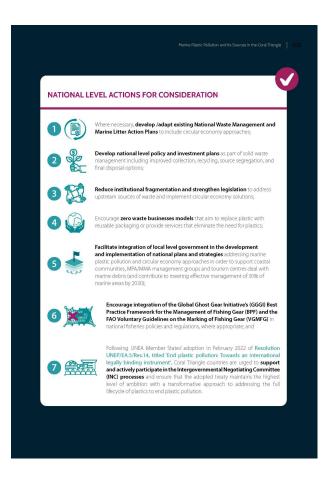
The stocktake report "Marine Plastic Pollution and Its Sources in the Coral Triangle" is available for download from

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:





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 2 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