

UNEA

Background Guide

VISMUN 2025

THE BEUREAU'S BRIEF

Dear Delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you all as the Executive Board to the United Nations Environment Assembly. In order for the committee session to be a fruitful experience, we request the delegates to be participative and active during the committee. Please note that this background guide is to be used as a direction for your research. You are expected to do your own research as well. Your real research lies beyond this guide and we are eager to see all of you discussing possible solutions together, applying all of your extensive research and great knowledge of the topics discussed in this committee. Understanding both the importance and complexity of this agenda, we strongly recommend you to be prepared and well researched in committee, and at the same time request you to participate at all times, making it a learning experience for all of us. All the best for the conference!

**Representatives of The
Presidency and The Bureau,
Devnandan Mahapatra**

President

Soumajyoti Sarkar

Vice President

WHAT IS THE UN?

- Founded in 1945 after World War II, the United Nations is a family of countries that work together to keep peace, protect rights, and solve global problems. It has six main organs: General Assembly (**GA**), Security Council (**SC**), Economic and Social Council (**ECOSOC**), International Court of Justice (**ICJ**), Secretariat, and Trusteeship Council (now inactive).
- The UN also includes many specialized agencies and programmes—like WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNEP, and the World Bank—that do daily work on health, education, environment, and development.
- Members debate, negotiate, set goals, and coordinate action. Think of the UN as a hub where nations share responsibility and build practical solutions together.
- We shall be simulating the UNEA. The governing body of the UNited Nations Environment Programme. UNEP is a subsidiary programme of the UN General Assembly; UNEA is UNEP's governing body. UNEA's outcomes (resolutions, decisions, ministerial declarations) are transmitted to the General Assembly; GA resolutions regularly take note of or reiterate UNEA ministerial declarations.



The **GA**

WHAT IS THE UNEA? THE CONTEXT.

- UNEA, the United Nations Environment Assembly, is the universal-membership governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). It meets in Nairobi to set global environmental priorities and to approve UNEP's Programme of Work and Budget. Unlike a treaty conference, UNEA's resolutions are not legally binding on states, but they carry strong political weight and direct UNEP's work: assessments, capacity-building, partnerships, and sometimes new negotiating processes.
- The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the universal-membership governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). It's the UN's top intergovernmental forum on the environment and sets UNEP's strategic direction, approves its Programme of Work & Budget (PoW/B), and adopts non-binding resolutions that often launch or steer global environmental initiatives and negotiations.
- UNEP itself was created by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1972 after the Stockholm Conference, by resolution 2997 (XXVII). That resolution established UNEP and a 58-member Governing Council (GC)—the forerunner to today's UNEA.
- In 2012, the Rio+20 outcome *The Future We Want* called for “strengthening and upgrading UNEP,” including universal membership of its governing body. UNGA implemented this via A/RES/67/213 (2012), and then changed the GC's name to “United Nations Environment Assembly” in A/RES/67/251 (2013). First UNEA met in 2014.

Resolutions adopted on the reports of the Second Committee 43

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GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Declares that no resolution adopted at the twenty-seventh session of the General Assembly can affect principles 21 and 22 of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

2112th plenary meeting
15 December 1972

2997 (XXVII). Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation

The General Assembly,
Convinced of the need for prompt and effective implementation by Governments and the international community of measures designed to safeguard and enhance the environment for the benefit of present and future generations of man,

Recognizing that responsibility for action to protect and enhance the environment rests primarily with Governments and, in the first instance, can be exercised more effectively at the national and regional levels,

Recognizing further that environmental problems of broad international significance fall within the competence of the United Nations system,

Bearing in mind that international co-operative programmes in the field of the environment must be undertaken with due respect for the sovereign rights of States and in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and principles of international law,

Mindful of the sectoral responsibilities of the organizations in the United Nations system,

Conscious of the significance of regional and sub-regional co-operation in the field of the environment and of the important role of the regional economic commissions and other regional intergovernmental organizations,

Emphasizing that problems of the environment consti-

(a) Sixteen seats for African States;
(b) Thirteen seats for Asian States;
(c) Six seats for Eastern European States;
(d) Ten seats for Latin American States;
(e) Thirteen seats for Western European and other States;

1. *Decides* to establish a Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, composed of fifty-eight members elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms on the following basis:

2. *Decides* that the Governing Council shall have the following main functions and responsibilities:

(a) To promote international co-operation in the field of the environment and to recommend, as appropriate, policies to this end;

(b) To provide general policy guidance for the direction and co-ordination of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;

(c) To receive and review the periodic reports of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, referred to in section II, paragraph 2, below, on the implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;

(d) To keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments;

(e) To promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system;

The resolution that created this.

A WORD ABOUT THE PROCEDURE

The mandate shall be explained in the committee, and in the conference shall help you understand and deal with the agenda better.

The Rules of Procedure to be followed shall also be addressed and explained in the first session of the committee. The basic expectation is that the delegates can go through the guide and then explore the topics discussed. The Procedure to follow shall be discussed, debated, and adopted based on what is best for the committee, prior to debate.

The committee shall have sufficient time to research well into most aspects of the agenda. The delegates shall always have the right to ask for time to research certain aspects of the agenda within committee time, but the better prepared you are the better debate we shall have! Rules of internet usage for research shall be decided on the first day.

The Paperwork, if the committee wishes to, will be along the lines of any end document of previous UNEA session. All possible approaches shall be explained.

NOTE : In this context, a mandate is the formal authority and instructions a UN body receives to do specific work. UNEA's mandate flows from the General Assembly: Resolution 2997 (1972) created UNEP and a governing council to set policy and oversee its Programme of Work and Budget; Resolution 67/213 (2012) upgraded UNEP; and Resolution 67/251 (2013) established the United Nations Environment Assembly with universal membership.

THE AGENDA

**Strengthening Global
Governance to Combat Plastic
Pollution and Marine Litter**

THE PRECEDENCE

- **UNEA-1 (2014): 1/6 — Marine plastic debris and microplastics**
 - Put the issue on UNEA's agenda; urged laws, reception facilities, and better waste management; tasked UNEP to synthesize science.
- **UNEA-2 (2016): 2/11 — Marine plastic litter and microplastics**
 - Built on 1/6; requested implementation reporting; leaned into prevention and life-cycle thinking.
- **UNEA-3 (2017): 3/7 — Marine litter and microplastics**
 - Created the AHEG (ad hoc open-ended expert group) to map barriers/options, catalyzing global options work.
- **UNEA-4 (2019): 4/6 — Marine plastic litter and microplastics**
 - Reaffirmed long-term elimination of discharges; pushed international response options (AHEG follow-up). Also adopted 4/7 on environmentally sound waste management
- **UNEA-5.2 (2022): 5/14 — End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument**
 - Mandated a plastics treaty covering the full life-cycle, including the marine environment; set up the INC (Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee). This is the landmark mandate for today's negotiations.
- **UNEA-6 (2024):** while not changing the treaty mandate, Member States adopted broader pollution & waste resolutions (15 total) and asked for progress updates
- **AHEG (2018–2020): The bridge to a treaty**
 - AHEG ran four meetings, consolidating barriers, voluntary initiatives, and global response options, and explicitly referenced a long-term elimination goal. **Its output underpins 5/14.**

These were all the actions that were previously undertaken by the UNEP. You might want to look them up, in any way possible, to understand the vast work your session is standing on right now. It is completely optional to go through the documents themselves.

It would be a good idea to research both "Plastic Pollution" and "Marine Litter" as topics.

We'll make sure delegates have links to all the mentioned documents, or any documents they would need access to during the conference.

HOW TO APPROACH THE SESSION 5 ACTION ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

UNEA resolution 5/14 (March 2022) is the moment the UN said, “Let’s write a plastics treaty.” It instructs UNEP’s Executive Director to convene an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, using a full life-cycle approach—from production and design to use and disposal.

It also points countries toward national action plans and stronger cooperation to tackle existing marine plastic, giving negotiators a clear worklist rather than just a slogan.

Why is it a landmark?

It's the first universal UN mandate to cover plastics across the entire life cycle and to launch a global treaty process—widely described as historic. The resolution set an ambition to complete negotiations by end-2024 (talks have continued), which created urgency for INC sessions.

UNITED NATIONS



United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme

EP

UNEP/EA.5/Res.14

Distr.: General
7 March 2022

Original: English

United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme
Fifth session
Nairobi (hybrid), 22 and 23 February 2021
and 28 February–2 March 2022

Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment
Assembly on 2 March 2022

5/14. End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument

The United Nations Environment Assembly,

Noting with concern that the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale, negatively impacting the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development,

Recognizing that plastic pollution includes microplastics,

Noting with concern the specific impact of plastic pollution on the marine environment,

Noting that plastic pollution, in marine and other environments, can be of a transboundary nature and needs to be tackled, together with its impacts, through a full-life-cycle approach, taking into account national circumstances and capabilities,

Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Reaffirming also the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992,

Stressing the urgent need to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels, improve understanding of the global impact of plastic pollution on the environment, and promote effective and progressive action at the local, regional and global levels, recognizing the important role played by plastics in society,

*Recalling United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions 1/6, 2/11, 3/7, 4/6, 4/7 and 4/9**
and affirming the urgent need to strengthen global coordination, cooperation and governance to take immediate action towards the long-term elimination of plastic pollution in marine and other environments, and to avoid detriment from plastic pollution to ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them,

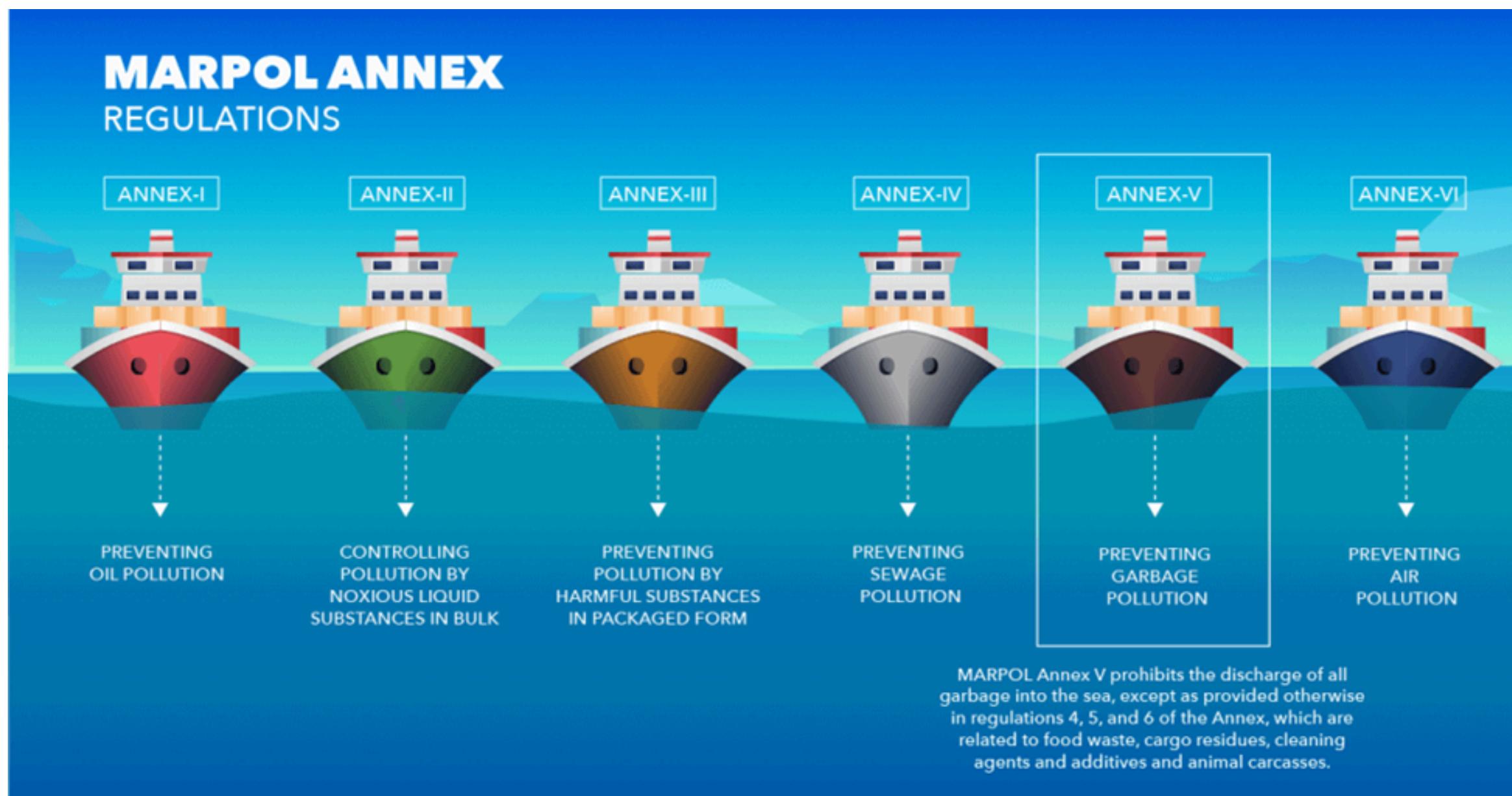
* On marine plastic debris and microplastics (1/6), marine plastic litter and microplastics (2/11, 4/6), marine litter and microplastics (3/7), environmentally sound management of waste (4/7) and addressing single-use plastic products pollution (4/9).

K2200733 120422

**The Resolution.
UNEP/EA.5/Res.14**

EXISTING RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

UNDERSTANDING THE MARPOL ANNEX AND MARINE LITTER



EXISTING RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

ANNEX 1 – Prevention of Pollution by Oil

Sr no.	MARPOL Annex I Special Areas
1	Mediterranean Sea area
2	Baltic Sea area
3	Black Sea area
4	Red Sea area
5	The Gulfs area (Between Ras Al Hadd and Ras Al Fasteh)
6	The Gulf of Aden area
7	The Antarctic area
8	The North West European waters
9	The Oman Area of the Arabian Sea

ANNEX 3 – Prevention of Pollution by Harmful Substances carried by Sea in Packaged Form

International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code
Class 5.1: oxidizing liquid of P.G. I>3000 L in (X)
Class 5.1: per chlorates, ammonium nitrate & ammonium nitrate fertilizers>3000 Kg or 3000 L in (X)
Class 6.1: toxic subs of P.G. I
Class 6.2: infectious subs of Category A
Class 7: Radio Active materials >3000 A1 or A2 type B(U) or B(M) or type C
Class 8: corrosive subs P.G. I>3000 Kg or 3000 L in (X)

ANNEX 2 – Prevention of Pollution by Noxious Liquid Substances in Bulk



2. MARPOL Annex II: Ship types

IMO Ship Type 1

is a chemical tanker intended for the transportation of products considered to present the greatest overall hazard. The quantity of cargo required to be carried in a Type 1 ship should not exceed 1,250 m³ in any one tank

IMO Ship Type 2

is intended to transport products with appreciably severe environmental and safety hazards which require significant preventive measures to preclude escape of such cargo. The quantity of cargo required to be carried in a Type 2 ship should not exceed 3000 m³ in any one tank

IMO Ship Type 3

is a chemical tanker intended to transport products with sufficiently severe environmental and safety hazards. These products require a moderate degree of containment to increase survival capability in a damaged condition. There is no filling restriction for chemicals assigned to Ship Type 3

ANNEX 4 – Prevention of Pollution by Sewage from Ships

ANNEX IV: SEWAGE

♦ applies to all ships ≥ 400 GRT carrying 14 persons or more

From Treatment Plants (TP)	Comminuted and Disinfected	Untreated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ TP has been approved by the Administration■ No visible floating solids or discolouration of surrounding water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ TP has been approved by the Administration■ At least 4 nautical miles from the nearest land	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Retained in holding tanks■ At least 12 nautical miles from the nearest land■ Discharge rate approved by the Administration■ Ship is proceeding en route minimum speed 4 knots

EXISTING RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

Type of garbage	Ships outside special areas	Ships within special areas	Offshore platforms (more than 12 nm from land) and all ships within 500 m of such platforms
Food waste comminuted or ground	Discharge permitted ≥3 nm from the nearest land, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge permitted ≥12 nm from the nearest land, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge permitted
Food waste not comminuted or ground	Discharge permitted ≥12 nm from the nearest land, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited
Cargo residues ¹ not contained in wash water	Discharge permitted ≥12 nm from the nearest land, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited
Cargo residues ¹ contained in wash water	Discharge permitted ≥12 nm from the nearest land, en route, as far as practicable and subject to two additional conditions ²	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited

ANNEX 5 – Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships

You can find a lot of solution-oriented work previously on Annex V.

ANNEX 6 – Prevention of Air Pollution by Ships



Maximum Sulphur Limits - IMO MARPOL Annex VI



- **limits the sulphur content in marine fuels**
- **different sulphur limits in open sea and in ECAs**
- **requires quality criteria for the marine fuels**

IMO Global S limit:

Currently	4.5%
1 July 2012	3.5%
1 January 2020 / (2025)	0.5% / (if not available in 2020)

IMO ECA limit:

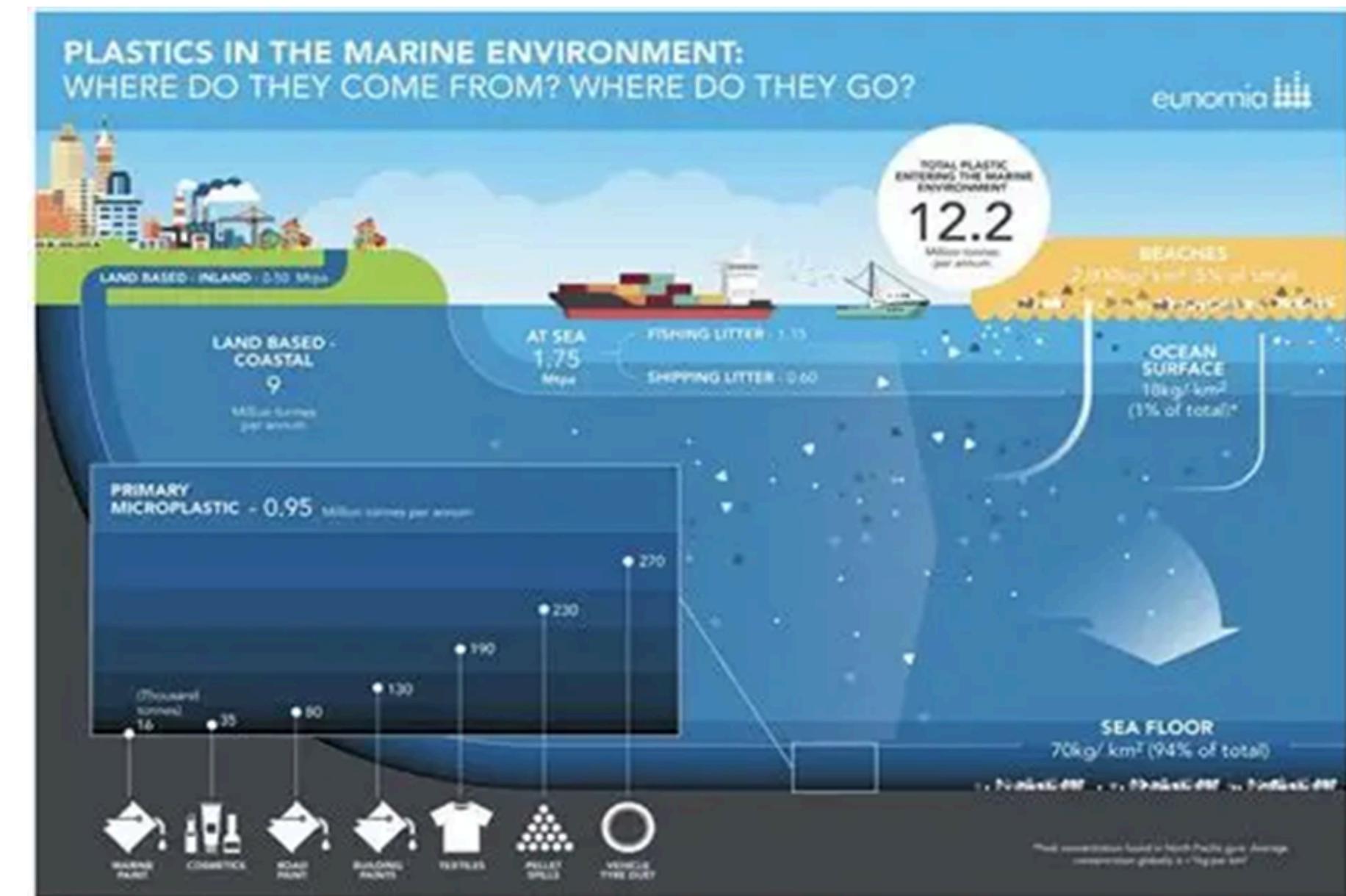
Initially	1.5%
1 July 2010	1.0%
1 July 2015	0.1%

ECA = Emission Control Area

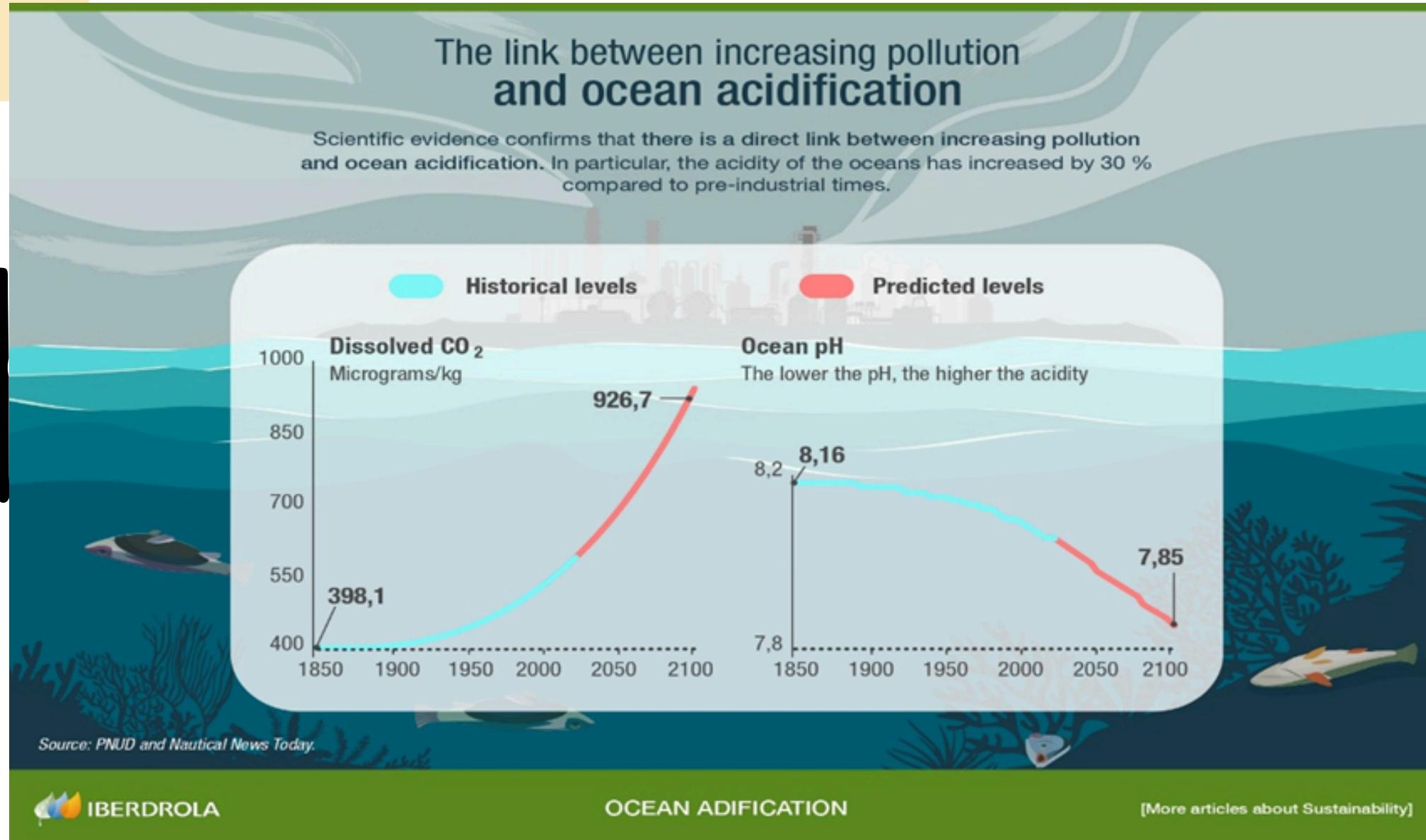
SOME DEFINITIONS

MARINE PLASTIC

- Primary microplastics. These particles come from commercial products. Examples are makeup, fishing nets, and clothing.
- Secondary microplastics. These particles come from plastics that break down into microplastics.



OCEAN ACIDIFICATION



KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Bioplastics also often contain additives such as stabilizers, antioxidants and antimicrobial agents which can hinder biodegradability.
- Marine Plastic litter washed ashore on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) originates from distant countries overseas and SIDS themselves.
- The plastics pollution problem is immensely magnified in the Global South, where rising production and consumption coexist with underdeveloped waste treatment systems and large volumes of imported plastic waste.
- Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) has been considered as the most harmful form of marine plastic debris with the global forum on deliberations upon the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI).

MARINE POLLUTION DUE TO SUNKEN VESSELS

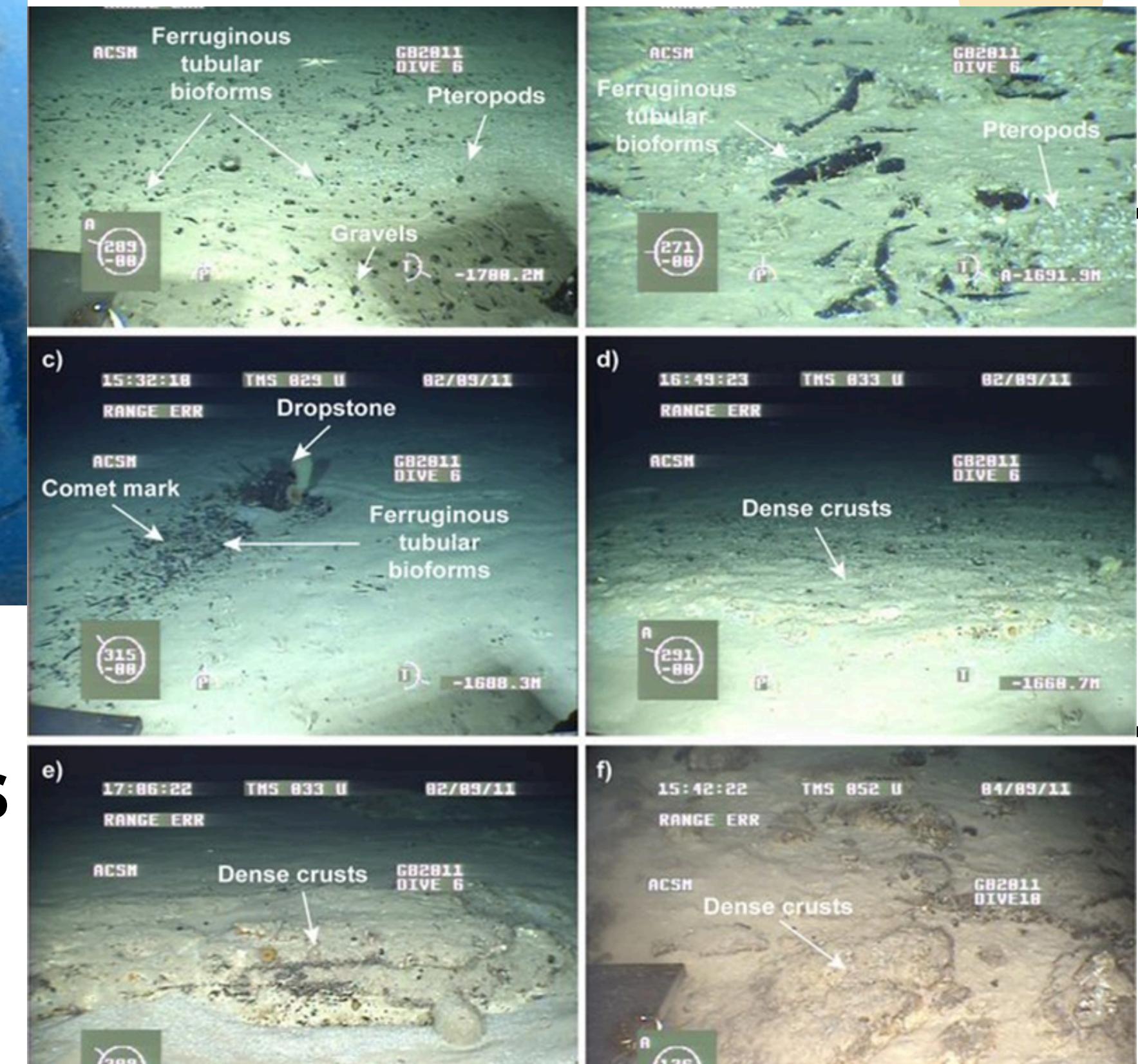
Marine Pollution from sunken vessels is predicted to reach its highest level this decade with over 8500 shipwrecks at risk of leaking approximately 6 billion gallons of oil.

Why is it important?

Marine pollution from sunken vessels is a global cross-border issue that affects the people, the environment and economies around the world.

Majority of wrecks date back to WW1 and WW2 and contain harmful chemical pollutants, unexploded munitions and an estimated 6 billion gallons of heavy fuel oil. This is 545 times more than the Exxon Valdez leak in 1989 and 30 times that of Deepwater Horizon Spill in 2010, both of which had severe and long-lasting environmental consequences.

The financial cost of responding to pollution from wrecks is prohibitively expensive for developing nations. It is also unclear who is responsible for their cost. Many of the countries most affected were not participants in WW1 and WW2 and ships sunk in war remain owned by the country they sailed for under the principle of sovereign immunity.



The Marine Pollution Glimpses

PARTING WORDS

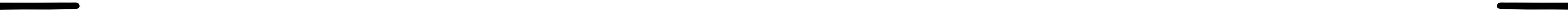
Delegates, please do understand that this document, is only but a brief idea. It would be great if you could give all the topics discussed in here a search. But feel free to go above and beyond. You will always have the right to discuss anything and everything, as long as the committee is in agreement, keeping the best interests of the agenda in mind.

You can look over any of the conventions, resolutions, any previous action or decision taken regarding the agenda (Like maybe you find documents like Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm about chemicals, or the London Convention of 1972, but not ways to integrate them into solutions). Remember, there will be sufficient time to figure out creative ways to weave them into solutions within the mandate. It is important to keep the focus on research, not being overwhelmed by the existing framework. We'll figure it out together.

— Feel free to reach out to us if you have any queries about this. It doesn't make much of a difference if you've experienced something like this previously, we are all in but different parts of the same journey. Lets focus on the learning. We are sure this conference will be some of the best days you'll have.

—

- Dev and Soumajyoti



ALL THE BEST!