

Recommendations for Vietnam's National Action Plan on Marine Debris

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**Addressing
Marine Plastics**
A Systemic Approach



Background

Since December 2018, Ocean Conservancy has worked closely with Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and in particular the Vietnam Administration for Seas and Islands (VASI) division during the drafting of the country's first National Action Plan on Marine Plastic Debris Management (NAP). The NAP is a critical step in determining the direction and scope of Vietnam's efforts to reduce marine debris through 2030. The NAP is expected to be finalized in September 2019 and will require a number of additional actions to ensure successful implementation.

As only the second Southeast Asian country to complete an action plan, there is great opportunity for Vietnam to leverage its leadership to encourage greater regional cooperation and commitment to reducing marine debris. As chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2020, Vietnam will continue to highlight the importance of the issue among government leaders in the region. In partnership with the Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD), Ocean Conservancy facilitated engagement of leading scientists and technical experts to provide insights on the proposed scope and measures outlined in the forthcoming plan. Below is a selection of topline input provided to the Vietnamese government during stakeholder review.

- ▶ **Financing solid waste management is integral**

Increasing access to financing for improved and more sustainable waste management infrastructure is integral in keeping waste from entering the ocean. Financing gaps persist due to low revenue and high investment risk in the waste management sector. This will be a key challenge to implementing portions of the Vietnamese National Action Plan and achieving marine debris reduction goals more broadly. Encouraging intragovernmental cooperation across ministries responsible for managing waste and ocean conservation will help mobilize necessary funding to reduce land-based sources of marine debris.

- ▶ **Data-driven policymaking is key**

In both determining measurable targets for reduction of marine debris and designing policy interventions to address the problem further upstream, data is key. Investment in identifying and filling research gaps will help ensure that solutions reflect local contexts and increases opportunities for regional and global information exchange. Stronger data also support greater efficiency by ensuring limited resources are focused on the solutions with the highest potential impact.

- ▶ **Rivers present an opportunity for high-impact interventions**

As a narrow coastal nation, Vietnam has a very dense network of rivers and associated communities that depend on them. With over 2,000 rivers spanning more than 10km, there is a significant opportunity to reduce waste leakage before it enters the ocean. Communities and wildlife depend on rivers for livelihoods and ecosystem services. Investment in cleaning up waste in the river through locally-appropriate technologies and preventing further leakage from entering, not only yields positive outcomes for marine environments but for communities as well.

- ▶ **Alternative materials come with challenges and opportunities**

Materials redesign and alternative materials is an important part of the solution set but it is also complex. National policies can encourage innovation and incentivize the development and availability of alternative materials, but the potential environmental tradeoffs should be considered. Considering the full lifecycle of new materials is important to safeguard against creating other environmental stressors like increased greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and the degradation of materials into microplastics.

► **Eliminating lost and abandoned fishing gear increases economic and ecosystem outcomes**

It is estimated that at least 640,000 tons of abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) enters the world's oceans each year,¹ adding to the estimated eight million metric tons of plastic entering the ocean annually from land-based sources.² ALDFG is considered the most deadly form of ocean plastic pollution for wildlife and damages fisheries in multiple ways. Addressing ALDFG requires a unique solution set that includes marking fishing gear to promote traceability, providing proper disposal facilities free of charge, and supporting the development of markets for returned material. Including sea-based sources of marine debris in the National Action Plan is a significant measure to promote the health of artisanal and commercial fisheries and the reduction of effects on wildlife and their habitats.

Vietnam has a tremendous opportunity to influence action among other governments in the region and globally. Investing in waste management, increasing availability and use of Vietnam-specific data to inform policymaking, including rivers and sea-based sources in the proposed solution set, and taking a lifecycle approach to alternative materials are a few of the many steps that will ensure positive outcomes for ecosystems and communities alike.

¹ Macfadyen, G., Huntington, T., Cappell, R. Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear. UNEP Regional Seas Reports and Studies, No. 185; FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 523. Rome, UNEP/FAO. 2009. 115p

² Jenna R. Jambeck, Roland Geyer, Chris Wilcox, Theodore R. Siegler, Miriam Perryman, Anthony Andrady, Ramani Narayan, Kara Lavender Law, "Plastic Waste inputs from land into the ocean." Science, 2015: 768-771.