

# OPEN LETTER

*This open letter is written by the Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA). We outline the importance of the pivotal Global Plastics Treaty, as well as our key policy recommendations that we hope Singapore's negotiating party will take into consideration.*

To the Singapore agencies in charge of plastics policies,

Our society, oceans and communities are choking on plastic trash. Yet, industries continue to pour millions of tonnes<sup>1</sup> of toxic, difficult-to-recycle plastic into our markets as our systems struggle to sustainably handle the ever-growing mountain of waste. We strongly believe that we are very far from the goal of reaching a sustainable, circular society.

On top of the need for stronger domestic policy, we believe that **Singapore needs to champion positions that can effectively tackle the plastics crisis**. We empathise with the quandary that the Singapore government has to navigate as it pushes for sustainable change. However, it is clear to us that these difficulties -- policy leakage, erosion of competitive advantage and incremental impacts -- reinforce the justifications for Singapore to also start looking at international environmental policy as a way to advance sustainable change.

Today, we are calling for Singapore to take a strong, forward-looking stance as the international community negotiates the Global Plastics Treaty. We call on Singapore to focus on 5 main advocacy positions:

1. **Strengthen transparency, tracking, monitoring and labelling obligations that cover both the upstream and downstream portion of plastics' value chain:** this will empower governments, communities, citizens and NGOs with the requisite information to make informed decisions and take effective action in tackling the plastic crisis.
2. **Plastic reduction targets:** to close the tap on industries that have plans to increase production exponentially, pouring virgin plastics into economies and communities struggling with plastic waste
3. **Simplification of plastics:** improve effective management of plastic chemicals to ensure safer and easier-to-recycle plastics in the market
4. **Enabling genuinely sustainable and effective downstream solutions:** to effectively and sustainably plug the gap on plastic waste emissions into our environment and communities, whilst closing the loop in a safe and environmentally-sensitive manner
5. **Implement a Plastic pollution tax on plastic-producing companies:** that can shift our systems away from highly toxic and unnecessary plastics and finance effective circular systems.

## Global Plastics Treaty (GPT)

The Global Plastics Treaty is set to be the world's first ever international treaty tackling the plastic crisis. The treaty aims to tackle the full lifecycle of plastic, from production to disposal. . There has been 4 rounds of negotiation with the final Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) session, INC-5, set to take place in Busan, South Korea, from November 25 to December 1, 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/plastic-pollution>

## Principles guiding our Calls

Our advocacy efforts have been carefully crafted based on conversations with youths, environmental groups and industry leaders. Key principles guide our calls, which we sincerely hope will be adopted by the Singapore government:

1. **Good governance is imperative for a shift towards a circular plastic economy:** The plastics industry has been one clouded by secrecy and deceptive marketing. Much information regarding the environmental and health hazards related to plastics are not disclosed, making it very hard for citizens and governments to make informed decisions. In fact, over 10,000 chemicals lack publicly available data<sup>2</sup>.
2. **Upstream regulation is a vital lever for tackling plastic pollution:** Most plastics are not economically recyclable. Singapore's 5% plastic recycling rate highlights the limitation of downstream solutions. Upstream regulations are needed to complement downstream solutions, to ensure the plastics that enter our markets are easily recycled or reused and do not cause harm to both people and planet.
3. **Toxic chemicals must be eradicated from plastic production** to protect human health and the environment. A large number of plastics include toxic additives, which serve no meaningful function, that are very damaging to human health and the environment. Over 3,600 known chemicals of concern are not regulated globally.
4. **Polluter Pays Principle:** The huge environmental, social and health costs plastics have wrecked on our societies continue to be one that is borne by our countries and communities, rather than the plastics industries and companies responsible. There is a significant financing gap for the requisite downstream solutions needed to sustainably process our plastic waste which can and should be financed by the industries responsible.

## Policy Recommendations

*Hence, we call on the Singapore government to adopt these key negotiating positions as they set off for the final negotiating session in November that will define the world's response to the global plastics crisis.*

### 1. Strengthening transparency, tracking, monitoring and labelling:

**There should be an implementation of publicly accessible and harmonised information** targeting both the upstream (plastic producers and manufacturers) and downstream (waste management and recyclers) parts of the plastic value chain. All information, together with their various environmental and human health hazards, should be made available on a publicly accessible database.

There are more than 16 000 chemicals potentially used or present in plastic materials and products, with only 6% of these currently subject to international regulation, although a much higher number present high exposure and harm risks for both environment and human health<sup>3</sup>. Huge data gaps are identified as a

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Wagner, Laura Monclús, Hans Peter H. Arp, Ksenia J. Groh, Mari E. Løseth, Jane Muncke, Zhanyun Wang, Raoul Wolf, Lisa Zimmermann (2024) State of the science on plastic chemicals - Identifying and addressing chemicals and polymers of concern, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10701706>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://plastchem-project.org/>

significant barrier to the effective governance and management of the plastics industry. On the downstream side, more comprehensive, accurate and granular data and reporting is needed to empower all stakeholders – corporates, governments, citizens and NGOs – to genuinely and effectively play their parts in fighting the plastics crisis<sup>4</sup>.

Hence, we propose implementing a national monitoring system, that is harmonised across methodologies and metrics. Inspiration can be drawn from global climate disclosure frameworks and regulations, as articulated by the WBCSD<sup>5</sup>. Relevant data should be made available in the form of a publicly available database, which publishes information on regulated plastic products throughout their life cycle. This platform would enhance the traceability of materials and products, accountability of the plastics industry, and enable the creation of targeted solutions and decisions by governments, consumers and companies.

## **2. Implementing science-based reduction targets at the national and global levels:**

**Reduction targets have to align to a science-based plastic production reduction of 40%.** We support Rwanda and Peru's call for a primary plastic reduction target of 40% by 2040, using a 2025 baseline. This target aims for a safe circular economy for plastics and aligns with the 1.5°C limit of the Paris Agreement.

**Reduction targets should prioritise PMBT plastics.** PMBT plastics are particularly concerning due to their heightened negative impact on human health and the environment. They have four key characteristics:

- **Persistent:** Long-term chemical presence in air, water, soil, or organisms.
- **Bioaccumulative:** Potential to stay and accumulate in wildlife and humans.
- **Mobile:** Potential to spread in fresh and drinking water systems.
- **Toxic:** Potential to harm living organisms.

More than 4,200 plastic chemicals are considered PMBT, with over 1,300 marketed for plastic use, and 29-66% of well-studied plastic types found to be of concern. A tiered approach and hazard scoring of plastic chemicals could help prioritise PMBT plastics for urgent reduction targets.

## **3. Simplify plastics production through using fewer and safer chemicals**

**A *safe-and-sustainable-by-design* concept should be advocated for in implementing upstream regulation for plastic production industries.** This concept emphasises integrating safety and sustainability from the earliest design stages. This includes setting high standards for chemical safety before market entry, funding research into simpler materials, and providing incentives for businesses to develop safer alternatives.

Currently, there are over 16,000 known plastic chemicals, with many unregulated and only a small fraction globally regulated. This complexity hinders effective governance and a circular economy. Simplifying chemical use in plastics can ease end-of-life waste management and reduce the negative impacts on public health and the environment.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wbcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WBCSD-plastic-disclosure-working\\_final\\_Full\\_v2.pdf](https://www.wbcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WBCSD-plastic-disclosure-working_final_Full_v2.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

#### **4. Enabling evidence-based, sustainable and impact-driven downstream solutions.**

**SYCA calls for the creation of downstream solutions that are not only able to keep waste exports to the bare minimum, but also actively incentivises a system that sees a continued reduction of waste generation.**

Poor downstream waste management infrastructure present gaps through which plastic waste escapes and pollutes our natural environment. This is especially applicable to Southeast Asia, that sees one of the highest volume of plastic waste leaked into the environment<sup>6</sup>.

Cognisant of disingenuous solutions that ineffectively manage waste and perpetuate harm on communities and the environment, **we call for the Global Plastics Treaty to limit support to downstream solutions, unless (a) waste generated is minimal; (b) outputs and processes are non-hazardous to people and environment; and (c) where impacted communities are meaningfully included.**

**Regional alignment and cooperation should also be actively supported.** Considering the transboundary nature of both linear and circular waste management processes, there is a vital need for regional alignment and cooperation to harmonise waste management and circular systems. With such support, inefficiencies and gaps that create plastic leakages can be eliminated and economies of scale in sustainably managing waste can be catalysed.

#### **5. Financing through implementing a plastic pollution tax.**

**SYCA calls for the implementation of a plastic pollution tax on plastic-producing companies.** Such a tax will help spur the switching to circular economic models (by industry) and reduce excessive demand (by consumers).

The fee would incentivize the development of sustainable plastics by imposing costs on plastic production while exempting approved sustainable polymers. Revenue from the fee could support treaty implementation and waste management infrastructure, especially in developing countries, and promote reusability of the plastics.

*If you would like to be a signatory of the above Open Letter, please visit [bit.ly/gpt\\_openletter](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/sustainability/southeast-asia-plastic-pollution-crisis-treaty-3530611).*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/sustainability/southeast-asia-plastic-pollution-crisis-treaty-3530611>