

BACK TO BASICS

What happened to reporting of statistical data in the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations?

BACKGROUND

- **UNEA Resolution 5/14.** To recall, [UNEA resolution 5/14](#) references promoting sustainable production and consumption of plastics, addressing the full lifecycle of plastic and reducing plastic pollution. The mandate also requests periodic assessments of implementation and effectiveness and scientific assessments of plastic pollution. This will require reporting: (i) statistical data across the lifecycle of plastic; and (ii) the measures taken by Parties to implement the obligations.
- **Reporting of statistical data.** Periodic reporting of statistical data on the pollutant in question is a standard feature of multilateral environmental agreements, the substrate upon which effective action depends. For example, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement require reporting of national inventories of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to methodologies adopted by the Conference of the Parties; the Montreal Protocol requires reporting statistical data on the production, imports and exports of ozone-depleting substances and hydrofluorocarbons and amounts used for feedstocks and destroyed; the Minamata Convention requires reporting of inventories of mercury emissions and releases, according to methodologies adopted by the Conference of the Parties.
- **Main purposes.** Reporting of statistical data serves two main purposes. First, it complements environmental monitoring by allowing scientists and policymakers to complete our understanding of the state of the environment and its evolution, providing information on sources (inputs into the economy and leakage) and trends that cannot be discerned from environmental monitoring alone. Second, it enables conclusions to be drawn on the overall effectiveness of the new instrument, which will then inform priorities and next steps.
- **Plastic pollution.** In the context of plastic pollution, statistical data for the relevant stages of the lifecycle of plastics should be forthcoming. On the front end, to promote sustainable production and consumption of plastic, reporting should include statistical data on production and consumption (use) of primary and recycled polymers, including both fossil and bio-based polymers. On the back end, to promote environmentally sound management, reporting should include statistical data on plastic waste management (generation, collection, landfill, incineration, recycling, leakage). In addition, related to releases and leakages, reporting should include sectoral contributions (fisheries, textiles, agriculture), including microplastics pathways and releases within the sector, as appropriate..

FORGOTTEN FUNCTION

- **Early recognition.** At INC-3, the [Zero Draft \(Nairobi\)](#) is replete with references to statistical data and other information across the relevant stages of the lifecycle of plastic, including, among others: (i) statistical data on types and volumes of its production, imports and exports of plastic polymers and products; (ii) types and volumes of its production, imports and exports of chemicals and polymers used in the production of plastic polymers, plastics and plastic products, and regulated plastic products across their life cycle; and (iii) collection, recycling and disposal rates.
- **Gradual weakening.** By INC-5.2, in the [latest Chair's Text \(Geneva\)](#), the reporting of statistical data was watered down to an undetermined and non-specific obligation (see below in ***italicized bold***):

ARTICLE 14 REPORTING

1. Each Party shall report to the COP on the measures taken to implement its obligations and, as appropriate, other provisions under this Convention, including as outlined in the national plan referred to in Article 13.
2. **Each Party [should][shall] include in its reporting** information on the challenges and effectiveness of such national actions and measures, as well as **data and information as appropriate and as available relevant to the obligations and commitments** of the Convention.
3. The COP shall, at its first meeting, adopt the format and periodicity, modalities, and guidelines for national reporting referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article.
4. The Secretariat shall make national reports submitted by the Parties under this Article publicly available.

COURSE CORRECTION

- **Main approaches.** Two approaches are typically taken towards setting out obligations to report statistical data under multilateral environmental agreements. In one approach, the instrument sets out in a general article on reporting the statistical data to be reported. This is the approach taken in [Article 7 of the Montreal Protocol](#) and [Article 13 of the Paris Agreement](#). In another approach, the instrument sets out in each specific article the relevant statistical data to be reported under that specific article, which is then cross-referenced in a general article on reporting. This is the approach taken in [Article 21 of the Minamata Convention](#) (general article on reporting) which cross-references specific articles, namely Article 3 (mercury supply sources and trade), Article 5 (manufacturing processes in which mercury or mercury compounds are used), Article 7 (artisanal and small-scale gold mining), Article 8 (emissions) and Article 9 (releases). Under either approach, the statistical data to be reported is clear and format, methodologies and other aspects are later adopted by the Conference of the Parties.
- **Finance relationship.** Negotiations on the financial mechanism have underscored the importance of providing financial support to developing countries for “enabling activities,” which typically cover reporting of statistical data. This involves, as an initial matter, establishing inventories to be followed by support for periodic reporting, ensuring the steady supply of information.
- **Textual clarity.** Negotiators should avoid conflating reporting of statistical data with reporting of measures or national plans while also avoiding voluntary language that would be subject to future negotiations. For example, whereas the [Zero Draft \(Nairobi\)](#) clearly differentiated between reporting of statistical data and reporting of measures, adopting the Minamata Convention approach of cross-referencing in a general article the statistical data to be reported in each specific article, the [latest Chair’s Text \(Geneva\)](#) suggests a voluntary obligation (“should”) with a qualifier (“as appropriate and as available relevant”) with no cross-references to any specific articles, calling into question whether statistical data would ever be forthcoming.
- **Editorial comment:** Do not use “volumes.” At various times in the negotiations, reporting obligations have mistakenly used the term “volumes” to describe what is to be reported. “Volumes” refers to the amount of space something occupies (e.g. litres, cubic metres) and not its weight (e.g. tonnes), which is the typical metric used for plastics and waste. Although there may be instances in which reporting volumes makes sense, it will not always be the case. As a result, “volumes” should be avoided and a flexible term such as “quantities” or “amounts” or just “statistical data” should be used, one which allows both volumes and weight to be reported, as needed.