

INC 5.2 Explainer

What you need to know about the global plastic pollution treaty negotiations:

- **Where in the negotiations are we now?**

Countries have been deliberating on a global plastic pollution treaty for nearly three years after [setting a mandate at UNEA-5.2](#) in 2022 to deliver an international legally binding agreement that can end plastic pollution.

From 5-14 August, more than 170 countries will meet in Geneva, Switzerland for the sixth and, for now, final round of talks, known as INC-5.2. The previous round (INC-5) in Busan at the end of last year was intended to be the last round of negotiations but countries couldn't reach an agreement. This despite majority support for a range of measures. Most notably, nearly 100 countries backed statements from Rwanda and Mexico which called for strong, mandatory measures for:

- Bans & phase-outs of harmful plastic products and toxic chemicals;
- Product design and system requirements to enable a non-toxic circular economy;
- Financial and technical support for developing countries and aligned financial flows;
- Decision-making mechanism to ensure gradual strengthening over time;
- Global targets to reduce plastic production.

Despite the lack of agreement, the Busan talks yielded a "[Chair's Text](#)", which negotiators have adopted as the starting point for the Geneva round of negotiations. This draft treaty text is meant to be a consolidation of different countries' proposals at INC-5. During INC-5.2, countries will need to iron out remaining differences (see section below on Faultlines) and work on delivering a final treaty text which can be adopted either through consensus or a vote.

- **What have negotiators been up to since INC-5?**

While there have been no formal meetings since INC-5 for negotiators to discuss next steps, there have been a number of important informal closed-door meetings led by different groups of countries aimed at furthering progress made at the previous round of negotiations.

One notable meeting was the Heads of Delegation meeting in Nairobi, Kenya held in early July. Negotiators discussed potential landing zones, including ideas for bridging divides where countries maintained differing views, and identified areas in the treaty text with sufficient convergence so these parts of the treaty can be finalised for review in the next round of talks.

Key elements, including the [already-agreed scope of the treaty](#) (that it should be mandatory and across the full plastic pollution lifecycle), continued to see significant pushback from a minority

group of countries who instead favour voluntary measures that focus on disposal and waste management. However, these countries favour such measures more as a means of protecting their own fossil fuel and petrochemical vested interests rather than such solutions proving to be credible solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

Regional and national consultations have also been organised in efforts to align key positions with the Chair's Text, and in some cases, receive further input from stakeholders.

While there have been efforts by progressive countries to 'build bridges' to find a solution that everyone can get on board with, we're concerned that, through these compromises, the ambition and shared vision for a strong treaty is being watered down in the process. Further, we've now entered a more political phase of the negotiations, where high-level Ministerial engagement from countries - particularly those supporting a strong treaty - is needed to give other countries confidence in their convictions and stand firm on their vision. However, right now high-level engagement is not where it needs to be for a strong agreement to emerge at INC-5.2.

One bright spark, which could herald more positive movements to come, was the [Nice Wake-up Call](#). Led by France and launched at the third UN Oceans Conference in June 2025, the declaration represented a renewed commitment and leadership by over 95 countries to forge a binding global treaty to end plastic pollution to protect human health and the environment. The declaration reflects a clear majority support for a treaty that addresses the full lifecycle of plastic pollution (specifically Articles 3, 5, 6, 11 and 20 - which touch upon the measures outlined above), and builds on the growing political momentum that emerged at INC-5 in Busan.

- **Do negotiators now have a full clean text to work with at INC-5.2?**

We do not expect a majority alignment on a full clean text by the time INC-5.2 starts, but the Nice declaration shows momentum towards a strong and ambitious treaty is growing, which can materialise at the negotiations next month in Geneva.

- **What are the major faultlines that haven't been ironed out?**

A minority group of countries continue to challenge the ambition and reach of the treaty in favour of protecting their own fossil fuel and petrochemical vested interests. The main areas of contention between these two factions are:

- **Scope of the treaty:** Despite the [UNEA 5.2 Resolution 5/14](#) specifically defining that the treaty would cover the full lifecycle of plastic (including its production, design and disposal), low ambition countries continue to push for the scope to be limited to disposal and waste management. Efforts by this minority to redefine the scope have persisted throughout the last five negotiations. They remain opposed to binding commitments on the upstream provisions, specifically those related to virgin plastic production and chemicals of concern in plastics, despite widespread agreement among the ambitious majority to include such provisions.

- **Consensus-based decision-making for future plastics Conference of Parties:** At INC-5, Norway proposed future Conference of Parties (what INCs evolve into once a treaty has been agreed upon) should have an agreed process to invoke voting if consensus cannot be reached - a move supported by almost 50 countries. In contrast, a consensus-based decision-making mechanism at future COPs would once again give any country the power to veto further measures and would significantly limit any future strengthening of the treaty.
- **Production reduction targets / cap:** More than 100 countries endorsed a proposal, led by Panama, for the inclusion of text on sustainable production of primary plastic polymers, requiring appropriate actions to reduce production in line with a global target, and mandatory reporting of production and import / export volumes. However, some countries insisted on the exclusion of any text relating to production reduction.
- **Global measures versus nationally determined action:** A majority of countries align behind the need for a harmonised set of global rules, as global standardisation of policies will be the most efficient, effective and economical way to ensure widespread changes across nations and businesses alike. These countries support reasonable flexibility to accommodate different circumstances in different countries but under an umbrella of common rules (for example, global lists and criteria). However, some countries insist that individual countries should be allowed to decide which measures they adopt and how to implement them. Allowing for nationally determined measures would however mean a regression towards voluntary action, which over the last few decades has proven to be insufficient to turn the tide on plastic pollution.
- **Finance and financial mechanism:** Countries broadly align on the importance of providing sufficient and timely financial support to the Global South, including but not limited to a dedicated financial mechanism that can enable effective and immediate implementation. But there is divergence around the specific responsibilities of countries to provide financial support, the range of financing sources, and the eligibility criteria for receiving funds. Many countries, particularly in the Global South, prefer the establishment of a new dedicated fund, which would focus only on supporting the implementation of this treaty. This type of fund can be used to support countries' capacities to target pollution at its source by focusing on upstream actions, as well as cover incremental costs of treaty implementation, such as policy development or monitoring and reporting. Global North countries, most of which are expected to provide public financial support to the financial mechanism, have instead proposed leveraging a broader range of financing sources, including private finance, and utilizing existing multipurpose funds such as the Global Environment Facility, which many Global South countries have expressed is often challenging for them to access and use effectively. Many countries, although not all, agree that alignment of public and private financial flows is an important component of the package of financial measures to implement the treaty.
- **Consensus proved elusive at previous INCs so can countries reach one at INC-5.2?**

The failure at the last negotiations was not simply a failure to conclude a treaty - it was a failure to conclude one *by consensus*. After more than two years of negotiations, countries, the INC Chair, and UNEP must accept that a treaty adopted by consensus – dictated by the lowest common denominator – will not yield a strong and ambitious outcome. A few low-ambition countries have made every effort to block new measures and prevent a binding global treaty emerging from these negotiations, denying countries their right to address this ever-worsening global crisis together.

In response, countries must now use all available procedural tools, with much greater discipline than in previous INCs, including the option of voting, to conclude these negotiations at INC-5.2 with a treaty containing legally binding obligations and enforceable rules that can provide the certainty needed to reduce global production and shift trade and consumption patterns.

- **What happens if consensus is not reached?**

Determining that a consensus can no longer be reached primarily comes down to the Chair recognising a few conditions:

- There needs to be a clean text / decision on the table that a majority of countries are vocally and actively getting behind;
- Countries opposed to the measures or clean text are being purposefully difficult, particularly in areas beyond the text, where it's clear they are trying to obstruct the process and a decision being made.

There are several ways this could then move forward to agree a treaty, including the call for a vote (most likely by an individual country) on the clean text or specific measures. Voting, as a decision-making tool, is not extraordinary; indeed, it is a legal norm established by the international law system. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the UN General Assembly, and the UN Environment Assembly all firmly recognise voting as a legitimate tool for the international community in making joint decisions.

We have seen voting used in multiple negotiations over the years - in particular, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (adopted by vote in 2017), the Arms Trade Treaty (adopted by vote in 2013), and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (adopted by vote in 1982).

When consensus is impossible, voting allows the majority to move forward while leaving the door open for others to join later. Voting embodies the spirit of multilateralism, facilitating collaboration to solve shared problems, even when not everyone agrees at first. More talking now is unlikely to result in radical shifts in position, particularly to the point where all countries agree. So now, countries must make a decision: To water the treaty down to please every one in the room or come together through a vote to form the strongest treaty that can address this crisis.

- **Will ministers attend? Who do we expect to see?**

For this round of negotiations, the INC committee has carved out a specific time towards the end for Ministers to attend. INC-5.2 has so far registered over 3,000 delegates and we understand 43 ministers and 60 high-level representatives from 59 countries are expected to attend. While attendance can change, this is a sharp increase in high-level engagement on the ground in these negotiations, building on the Ministerial-level Nice declaration in June. This is a positive signal of strong commitment from countries to ensure they leave INC-5.2 with a concluded treaty.

- WWF publications/tools to help you better navigate INC-5.2
 - 1) For WWF's Global Plastic Navigator, a platform for tracking countries' positions on the inclusion of measures being debated at the INCs, click [here](#).
 - 2) For a brief on what to expect from INC-5.2, and what WWF would like to see the negotiations accomplish, click [here](#).
 - 3) To browse through all WWF reports and resources on INCs, past and present, click [here](#).

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