

Environmentalists are hopeful that upcoming negotiations in Paris will break free from the sway of lobbyists

The amount of plastic consumed in G20 countries is on course to nearly double by 2050, unless a legally binding global plastics treaty succeeds in curbing waste trends, according to a recent report by Back to Blue, a research group run by the Economist Impact think tank and the Nippon Foundation.

Environmentalists are hopeful that the second round of negotiations for the UN Global Treaty to End Plastic Pollution set to begin in Paris in May will be more fruitful than the first. The inaugural plastics summit (Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, or INC1) closed in Uruguay at the end of last year without a huge amount of progress, as it was largely focused on procedural issues, but the fact that the negotiations happened at all was reason enough for some to celebrate.

"We have been able to lay down some foundation principles upon which to build for the coming INCs," said Fatumanava-o-Upolu III Dr. Pa'olelei Luteru, Samoa's representative to the UN. "Obviously, we cannot agree on everything at this stage, but we need to make room for flexibility because the more difficult part of these negotiations has yet to come."

It's fitting that the next round of negotiations will take place in France – not only because Paris was where the landmark agreement **to limit global warming to 1.5°C** was reached, but because the EU is leading the way on plastics. Last year, the European Commission proposed rules that would require companies to use packaging that could be recycled, reused or composted. And the EU has laid out a goal to cut packaging waste by 15% (of 2018 levels) by 2040. The target may sound fairly low, but it would signal a major shift. The EU's proposals for the global plastics treaty are also ambitious. They include global targets to limit plastic production – something the American delegation didn't include in its proposals but environmentalists see as a necessary way to curtail plastic pollution.

"The European Union is playing a leading role in advocating for a high-ambition, legally binding global agreement under the UN process to end plastic pollution,"

Steve Fletcher, director of the Global Plastics Policy Centre at the U.K.'s University of Portsmouth, told BNN Bloomberg. "The current proposals are aligned with that high ambition that they want to see developed through the treaty process."

A plastics treaty takes shape

Activists want to see negotiations in France also focus on how nations will work to end the production of virgin plastic, and they want any treaty to address the entire life cycle of plastics, from extraction to disposal.

Hanging over all of this is the influence of the **petrochemicals industry** – a consolidated sector with lots of lobbying power behind it. While there are around 500 corporations that produce plastic, only 25 companies are responsible for half of the world’s plastic pollution, according to a recent study by the [European Investment Bank](#).

“In a huge conflict of interest, the private sector continues to have far too much influence over these negotiations, including the polluters responsible for the global plastic pollution crisis,” wrote Greenpeace’s Kaitlyn Trent and Graham Forbes in a December blog post. They add that plastics manufacturers currently have as much say in these kinds of negotiations as the communities and scientists fighting against pollution: “Plastics treaty negotiations cannot be co-opted by welcoming oil and plastics industry [lobbyists](#) to dominate the discussion and weaken ambition.”

In Canada (where the fourth round of negotiations are expected to take place), plastic producers, such as Dow Chemical and Imperial Oil, are teaming up with the provincial governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan to sue the federal government for designating plastic products as “toxic” and prohibiting the sale of six single-use plastic items, including disposable plastic bags, cutlery and straws. The case could have consequences on how the federal government can regulate **plastic pollution**.

On the global stage, [INC](#) negotiators are aiming to draft a legally binding agreement by the end of 2024. If they’re going to reach that goal, some of the heavy lifting will have to be done in Paris.

Source: [Corporate knights](#)