

# **An Ocean Full of Plastic**

**By Kaya Andreassen**

Over 100,000 marine animals die each year from plastic digestion. Plastic in the ocean is a serious issue, and the amount of plastic is increasing every year. Ocean pollution harms plants and animals, and it exposes chemicals that can contaminate the water. It is even predicted that by 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.

The United Nations is the perfect place for different countries to come together and discuss a solution for the plastic in the ocean. An issue discussed frequently was the Pacific Garbage Patch. This floating mass of garbage consists of both the Western and Eastern Garbage Patch. The Western patch is located near Japan, and the Eastern patch is located between Hawaii and California. These massive piles of trash are formed by the movement of the currents. The currents in the ocean push the debris together and cause them to get stuck. To make matters worse, most of the items in the garbage patch are plastic items, which are non-degradable. The Pacific Garbage Patch covers twice the size of Texas and is nine times the size of New Zealand.

Many countries suggested different plans of action to minimize the amount of plastic being thrown into the ocean. The country of Israel proposed that we “should have a packaging law and impose taxes on plastic bags in grocery stores.” China produces the most plastic in the world, and they stated that they “plan to recycle 35% of the plastic waste by 2020.” The Republic of Korea also contributed to these positive plans by saying that “UNEP can create an alliance with other countries for more biodegradable products.” Canada plans to ban single-use plastic by 2021. Instead of plastic, they want to turn to sustainable and long-lasting bamboo, because it is cheap and biodegradable. Many countries liked the idea of using biodegradable products, and they even suggested that these items have a lower tax rate to encourage people to buy them.

There are many factors that contribute to trash ending up in the seas. Pollution in the ocean does not come just from placing debris directly into the ocean. The United Kingdom reported that many of its rivers are polluted, and when these rivers are polluted, they eventually end up flowing into our oceans. In the Philippines, typhoons are a large contributor to ocean pollution. When the storms sweep up the trash on land, it gets carried away and washes into the ocean. Israel also has a similar problem; most of the trash left on their beaches gets washed away.

The United States suggested the creation of a new technology for rivers that would prevent plastic from entering the ocean. Many countries discussed first helping the countries that can't afford the technology. Going to the less fortunate countries first would take care of one of the root causes of plastic in the ocean. For example, the Philippines is the third-largest source of

plastic in the ocean, but as one of the poorer countries in the world, they cannot do much to prevent it. Vietnam and Korea suggested getting support from other countries to fund for these cleaning systems.

The UNEP delegates from each country had many great ideas to solve the issue of plastic in the ocean. One of the main issues discussed was where the trash will end up once it's cleaned up. Some suggested recycling plastic, while others wanted it to be placed in a sanctuary. This issue is a major problem worldwide, and there is still an ongoing discussion on how to properly get rid of plastic in our ocean. As young people of this generation, UNEP is taking steps for a healthier place for the environment, animals, people, and the future.