

**Adress of welcome**

by

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at the

„International Conference on Prevention and Management of

Marine Litter in European Seas“

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Dear conference attendees,

A warm welcome to Berlin! During the upcoming days we will jointly address a pressing topic, which has recently climbed up high on the political agenda and within the public perception.

Nature works on a basic principle: organic matter comes into existence, degrades and disappears. In our plastic era, we depend on synthetic substances for which nature's basic principle does not apply.

Plastic is light, cheap and can be used for almost every application. And: it is more or less indestructible. Once plastic found its way into the marine environment it needs centuries to degrade and finally stays permanently in form of smallest particles.

Since the plastic age began in 1907 with the start of industrial production hundreds of millions of tonnes of plastics have reached our oceans. In average three

quarters of the litter items found in the world oceans consist of plastics. Meanwhile all marine habitats are contaminated. Approximately 100 to 140 Million tonnes of plastics are currently present in the marine environment. 70 % is on the seafloor and the rest is floating at the surface, in the water column or being washed up on beaches. Only in the North Sea, 600.000 cubic meters are buried on the seafloor. Evidence is growing that marine litter has detrimental effects on wildlife and habitats and on marine biodiversity in general. 95 % of the marine bird species fulmars found dead on German beaches have plastic in their stomachs - in average 30 pieces. Investigations show that ingestion of litter items does regular occur in 43 % of whales, dolphins and porpoises, 36 % of all seabirds and many fish species. 136 marine species have been found frequently entangled in marine litter. Fishing related litter such as floating or seafloor covering nets and ropes account for around a tenth of the waste in the oceans. The decline of deep sea sharks can be correlated with the 20.080 nets

with a length of 1.254 km which are on average annually lost in deep sea fisheries in the North-East-Atlantic.

Other main sources are riverine and deposit inflows, overflow of sewage water systems, tourism and recreational activities at the coasts, shipping, illegal deposition, industrial activities and improper transport.

The main introduction pathways vary strongly between regions. Whereas in the Southern North Sea shipping and fishing activities are the most prominent sources, available data for the German Baltic Sea suggests that the main origins of litter are tourism and other recreational and industrial activities along the coasts.

So-called microplastics, meaning plastics smaller than 5 mm, are also introduced directly. Passing sewage treatment plants, microplastics mainly come from cosmetic products, synthetic abrasive blast cleaning or in the form of fibres from clothing. Microplastics have been found recently in all samples of fish stomachs and seal

feces in the Lower Saxonian Waddensea. Microplastics became an issue of particular concern, as they are ubiquitous and reach even most remote areas, contain and absorb chemical substances and may have high potential for contaminating the food chain.

The European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) as the environmental pillar of the “Integrated Maritime Policy” is a key driver to address marine litter. The Directive requires to achieve or maintain a “Good Environmental Status” (called GES) by 2020. This includes the objective that “Properties and quantities of marine litter do not cause harm to the coastal and marine environment.” In order to get the information required to assess whether GES is achieved, appropriate monitoring inter alia on marine litter is required. Being one agency in Germany in charge for the implementation of the MSFD in relation to marine litter we are currently running a research project with the aim to develop appropriate monitoring and assessment methods for marine litter in

German waters. Within the project statistical methods are being developed to analyze trends in the level of pollution of the different marine compartments and to assess the harm marine litter causes to biota. The project also models the transport of drift trajectories of floating litter, compiles and evaluates methods for detecting and characterizing microplastic- particles and their adverse effects on marine organisms and continues the national OSPAR Fulmar-Litter gut monitoring. In addition we plan investigations of selected marine organisms with regard to the burden of plastics they carry and the correlated potential accumulation of toxic and hormonal effective substances. Later this year and based on the output of the first project and the recommendations by the MSFD GES Technical Subgroup Marine Litter we plan to start a pilot project on a coherent marine litter monitoring of German coastal and marine waters and the ecological consequences with a focus on further identification of sources. In the long-term perspective a regional harmonized monitoring of European marine waters and

their catchment areas is required to improve the evidence base as foundation for targeted measures to prevent further input of litter.

I am of the opinion that litter doesn't belong into the marine environment. This view is shared by the German institutions responsible for the MSFD implementation. Consequently, the overall environmental target laid down in our national report on Article 10 MSFD reads "Seas without marine litter." This visionary goal is underpinned by three operational targets which aim at an initial reduction of marine litter in the different marine compartments and biota in the order of 50 percent by 2020 as a first major step.

Contributing sources preferably need to be addressed in a regionally harmonized way. Current knowledge allows and necessitates the elaboration of regional action plans to reduce and avoid marine litter. A suitable region-specific mixture of measures needs to be applied.

With the conference we want to support information exchange amongst Member States and other Contracting Parties of the Regional Seas Conventions to foster a coherent approach in order to combat litter pollution of European marine waters. The main goal of this conference is therefore to facilitate and establish the further development of Regional Action Plans for the four European Seas such as Northeast Atlantic including the North Sea, Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea with support of the Regional Seas Conventions.

Current awareness and implementation of best practices in addressing the causes of marine litter are primarily focused on end-of-pipe solutions. Furthermore, cleaning activities of marine litter at beaches or at sea are costly, time-consuming and capture only small amounts of litter present in the environment. In addition, these cleaning activities could also pose certain harm to marine ecosystems such as unwanted removal of species together with pieces of marine litter.



From my point of view, a clear enhancement of prevention measures at source is necessary in order to prevent litter from being introduced into the environment and oceans.

To achieve this I could think of different suitable measures. Today I want to name three of them as a suite of solutions to our shared problem. In Germany, plastic bags are already liable to a charge at the cashiers of food shops, whereas bags in other sectors such as drugstores are still free of charge and are handed out with or without request by the consumer. Recent data suggest that those bags free of charge are more frequent to be found at beaches of the German Baltic Sea (islands of Fehmarn and Rügen). The Federal Environment Agency therefore supports the introduction of a general fee for all plastic bags.

Other possible starting points include the use of the ongoing revision process of the EU Directive on Port

Reception Facilities for ship-generated waste and cargo residues (2000/59/EC) to ensure a consistent and uncomplicated disposal in European harbors, an approach which is already successfully applied as “No-special-fee-system” in the Baltic Sea. In addition litter management at sea can be improved, some innovative German techniques for application on commercial ships will be presented in the course of the conference.

Last but not least further primary input of microplastics should be prevented. Unilever, as a consequence of a call from 22 NGOs to stop using microplastics in products currently promised to phase them out from their products by 2014. The Dutch House of Representatives committed itself to call for a ban of microplastics in personal care products at the European level. These efforts which will also be further discussed at the conference and could be used as one positive example in Europe.

Beside preventive measures, we urgently need to promote and improve re-filling, recycling and re-use structures. This includes internationally agreed approaches to the design and marketing of products internationally which take appropriate account of their environmental fate or ability to be recycled in the locations where they are sold.

I am really enthusiastic to see such a big audience following our invitation! I am looking forward to fruitful discussions during the upcoming days and wish you a very good time in Berlin.