



Media release – 25th March, 2019

Plastics industry plan to reduce microplastic pollution “needs urgent implementation”

The announcement by plastics industry representatives of plans to develop a certification scheme to reduce plastic pellet pollution follows last week’s UN resolution which pledged to curb pellet pollution and reduce single-use plastic

All sectors of the plastic industry must urgently deliver on their promise to stop plastic pellet pollution, conservationists have said, with the threat to marine animals posed by this type of microplastic growing daily in the absence of comprehensive action.

The commitment announced today by industry group Plastics Europe to develop a certification scheme to stop pollution from plastic pellets – also known as nurdles – will in theory see many of the world’s largest plastics manufacturers audit their facilities and operations to stop plastic pellets being spilt on land and at sea.

Conservation and environmental groups including Fauna & Flora International (FFI) are now urging plastics manufacturers to focus on the delivery of the scheme and asking them to encourage implementation across the whole supply chain.

“A growing threat”

Dilyana Mihaylova, Marine Plastics Projects Manager at Fauna & Flora International, said:

“Nurdle pollution poses a growing threat to marine animals and marine ecosystems and the industry needs to move fast to get on top of this problem. The certification scheme is a step towards the level of transparency we have been calling for. The important thing now is that the industry moves quickly to turn this commitment into action.”

Countries around the world are waking up to the reality of microplastic pollution and the need for a broad solution. Last week the UN passed a resolution to significantly reduce single-use plastic and tackle plastic pellet pollution across the whole manufacturing and supply chain.

Mihaylova continued: “The response from the plastics industry must be not just fast but also strong. We need to see a robust certification scheme that tackles the root causes of nurdle pollution and we also need third-party oversight so we know the scheme is working.”

Nurdle pollution threat growing

The UN resolution follows commitments to act on plastic pellets highlighted in a range of policy announcements, including the EU Plastics Strategy and the G7 Plastics Charter.

Plastic pellets are produced, transported and melted together by the plastics industry to create almost all the plastic products we use. Spilt and discarded by companies in massive numbers, it is estimated that 53 billion nurdles end up in British seas every year.

Nurdles and other microplastics have been found throughout the marine food chain and researchers say nurdles may transport chemical contaminants into the bodies of marine animals that eat them.

In January, an investigation by Fauna & Flora International found plastic pellets polluting beaches that are home to Britain's iconic seal colonies.

In February the Great Global Nurdle Hunt organised by environmental NGO Fidra found pellets on beaches in 28 countries, including in some of the world's most isolated places: a nurdle hunt on Tortuga Bay in The Galapagos Islands, for example, found more than 9,000 plastic pellets.

Voluntary scheme

The voluntary nature of the scheme means that companies in the plastics supply chain can continue to remain unaccountable for their role in the problem. FFI, along with NGO partners the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Fidra, are therefore calling for the certification scheme to be backed up by national and regional legislation which mandates best practice along the plastic supply chain, with monitoring and enforcement to ensure implementation of effective measures to prevent pellet loss.

"Today's commitment is a positive step, but much more will be needed to curb pellet pollution," **said Tim Grabiell of the Environmental Investigation Agency.** "As recently recognised by the United Nations Environment Assembly, pellet pollution must be addressed across the whole manufacturing and supply chain, and this can only be achieved with legislation requiring such certification schemes to be used and implemented."

Madeleine Berg, project manager at Fidra, said:

"Sadly it's not surprising that we found pellets on so many shorelines worldwide, as we know it's a pollutant that is globally widespread. Our results not only show that pellets are found everywhere around the world, but also that a growing number of people know and care about the issue. We had more than 1200 volunteers help us hunt for pellets, across all 7 continents, and were supported by at least 75 different organisations. We're delighted to see the UN take note of this issue and urge action on an international scale to tackle this global issue."

- ENDS -

For further information (including high resolution images), please contact:

Nathan Williams, FFI press & media
Email: Nathan.williams@fauna-flora.org
Tel: 01223 749010

Notes to editors:

1. For a copy of the Plastics Europe report outlining the commitment to initiate the development of the certification scheme go to: <http://www.opcleansweep.eu/operation-clean-sweep-report-2018/>
2. To see the UN resolution pertaining to microplastics go to: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1900897.pdf>
3. To see the results of Fidra's Great Global Nurdle Hunt 2019 go to: <https://www.nurdlehunt.org.uk/>.
For high-res images of the Great Global Nurdle Hunt 2019: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ebqqrglltvgtvk/AADtS_NEmJoov5P13DvVNigKa?dl=0

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and that take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international wildlife conservation organisation and a registered charity.

About Fidra

Fidra established The Great Nurdle Hunt to support our aim of preventing plastic pellet pollution. Fidra is an environmental charity working to reduce plastic waste and chemical pollution in our seas, on our beaches and in the wider environment. Fidra shines a light on environmental issues, working with the public, industry and governments to deliver solutions which support sustainable societies and healthy ecosystems. We use the best available science to identify and understand environmental issues, developing pragmatic solutions through inclusive dialogue. We aim to stop further plastic pellet pollution of our seas and beaches using a combination of public and industry engagement. The online nurdle map www.nurdlehunt.org.uk pinpoints hundreds of locations where pellets have been found across the world. Fidra is a Scottish registered charity and SCIO (SC043895)

About Environmental Investigation Agency (eia-international.org)

We investigate and campaign against environmental crime and abuse. Our undercover investigations expose transnational wildlife crime, with a focus on elephants and tigers, and forest crimes such as illegal logging and deforestation for cash crops like palm oil. We work to safeguard global marine ecosystems by addressing the threats posed by plastic pollution, bycatch and commercial exploitation of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Finally, we reduce the impact of climate change by campaigning to eliminate powerful refrigerant greenhouse gases, exposing related illicit trade and improving energy efficiency in the cooling sector.