



Facilitating Global Circularity of Plastic Feedstock via the UN Plastic Treaty and Basel Conventions

Enabling Standardized, Verified and Trusted Trade Procedures

November 8, 2024

As UN member state delegations are entering their final months of negotiating an agreement to reduce plastic pollution, the issues of plastic pollution, feedstock and recycling are less discussed and focused on than one would think. Recycling is the engine that drives circular systems, and the reuse of secondary products and materials that would otherwise become waste. Leading into the final negotiations at INC5 of the Plastic Treaty in Busan, South Korea, more focus can and should be given to the facilitation of global circular economies and its potential for recovery and remediation of plastic feedstock. The end result is shared capacities, reduced replicative efforts on infrastructure financing, and the opening of global markets where demand for recycled content will help drive the recovery of materials. This creates jobs, community betterment, private investment and of course, plastic pollution reduction.

The UN Plastic Treaty is currently being negotiated to reduce global plastic pollution, and though most of the reduction, reuse and punitive measures to slow the creation of plastic waste are beneficial to some extent, like other solutions, their impact is likely to be a fraction of what is needed. At the same time, there has been little focus on recycling via the scaled recovery and remediation of plastic which is already in the environment, or which will continue to be used for years to come as both consumption patterns and light-weighting for CO2 reductions continue to increase.

In order to address the objectives of the UN Plastic Treaty, global circularity will need to be embraced, as financing of domestic recovery and processing is already significantly underfunded. The treaty can and should be created to facilitate and complement the already existing Basel Convention and its recent plastic amendments on the trade of non-valuable materials, and it is this nuance which is the most important to the stakeholders involved. Creating a system of verified, standardized rules and regulations on the trade of feedstock from pre-qualified buyers and sellers will open a myriad of opportunities for both recovery and processing to take place at scale. This will reduce the financial burden of most of the member-states who do not have sufficient domestic processing of materials today, and which will be difficult to achieve without the creation of a large global fund for capacity building and infrastructure, much like that required for climate change scenarios.

Plastic mitigation resembles carbon reduction or sequestration, except that most stakeholders do not want to see plastic burned or gasified for energy, and landfills are becoming an increasingly expensive option. The planet's plastic pollution issues, which touch every UN member state, cannot be solved simply with "future" regulations, commitments and programs for reduction. A wide range of solutions is needed. These are already available, but rarely given visibility or replicated in global markets.

This is partly because recycling is portrayed as being ineffective, despite that it is the only broad program cutting across communities and governments for the recovery of materials. Without recycling, it will be very difficult to create scaled circular economies, nor will brands both big and small be able to reach their commitments to use recycled content instead of virgin material. It is now estimated that the excess demand for recycled content is over 6 million tons per year, and this will likely grow as member states become more engaged in the outcomes of the UN Plastic Treaty, whether voluntary or mandatory in nature. Without access to an international market, allowing for the demand for the purchase of feedstock, domestic EPR programs may reach their full potential, as material collected under the programs may not find full value-potential with those who can properly buy, process and sell this feedstock to multinational brands who can use it.

The discussions at the UN Plastic Treaty to date have often deferred any trade details to the operations within the Basel Convention, which is already well established, but, *if these two treaties are not appropriately aligned, we risk the chance of missing the original pollution reduction goals and objectives.* The timing of the UN Plastic Treaty discussions in November, and the COP17 Basel Convention discussions in April offer the perfect sequencing of events for these **conventions to be aligned, helping to facilitate the Plastic Treaty's objectives.** This will open the doors for opportunities for the international waste management and recycling communities to play their respective roles in reducing global plastic pollution, creating jobs and environmental improvements along the way, where financing and appropriate national legislations remain uncertain.

We call on member state delegates for each of the UN Plastic Treaty and Basel Conventions to align in their knowledge, understanding and expectations for the facilitation of trade of legitimate feedstock, and the creation of a global circular market for recovered materials. This can be directed at improvements needed for standardization and new qualification procedures for pre-approved buyers and sellers within the Annex of the Basel Convention's Plastic Amendments for Plastic.

Douglas Woodring
Founder and Managing Director
Ocean Recovery Alliance