



Common  
Seas



UNIVERSITY OF  
PORTSMOUTH  
GLOBAL PLASTICS  
POLICY CENTRE

# Delivering an effective Global Plastics Treaty through coordinated national action



National Plans are commonly used as an implementation measure in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Research by the Global Plastics Policy Centre suggests there is a high chance that an approach based on National Plans will be selected as an implementation measure for the forthcoming Global Plastics Treaty. However, National Plans in previous MEAs have encountered several stumbling blocks that have limited their effectiveness. **In this brief, we suggest ways to overcome the known stumbling blocks to ensure the National Plans approach can be successful in implementing the Global Plastics Treaty, both at an international and national level.**

**We suggest a clear position for how National Plans could be adopted through two main lenses: in the treaty text and in national governments.**

## → 1. How National Plans can deliver an effective Global Plastics Treaty:

We investigate how National Plans should be revised in the treaty to ensure effectiveness, based on research by the Global Plastics Policy Centre on National Plans in other MEAs.

1. National Plans should be supported by national legal and institutional frameworks, along with stringent compliance measures at the international level;
2. National targets and measures included in the National Plans should align with the obligations of the MEA;
3. Robust monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and data sharing, including transparency and disclosure should be included;
4. National Plans should be informed by the latest information and lessons learned by frequent revisions, supported by high quality, independent and conflict-free research and scientific support in the implementation of the MEA and;
5. Technical and financial assistance along with global cooperation and coordination is necessary to ensure successful implementation and compliance.

Revising National Plans in the treaty by adopting the five enablers outlined above would allow for individual country contexts to be considered by national governments without compromising progress towards the treaty's global goals.

## → 2. How National Plans can drive action at the national level:

We suggest ways to ensure that National Plans can drive effective action at the national level, based on Common Seas' experience working with government partners to co-design and deliver National Plans in-country.

Drawing from practical experience co-designing National Action Plans with 7 government partners, key ingredients for National Plans to drive meaningful action at the national level include:

- evidence-based policymaking,
- adopting focused and actionable approaches
- leveraging existing initiatives
- assessing economic and social impacts
- establishing robust monitoring mechanisms
- prioritising inclusivity and collaboration
- identifying available funding sources.

## National Plans in the context of Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) typically outline different “implementation measures” to ensure the agreement is implemented effectively. They generally require the adoption of national measures to fulfil the obligations laid out in a treaty instrument.<sup>1</sup>

**National Plans are one type of implementation measure commonly used in MEAs. This is due to their ability to catalyse action that can facilitate coordination within and between governments, converting global or regional commitments to an actionable plan that is nationally and practically relevant.**

National Plans give a government the opportunity to “review the past and current extent of its implementation on a specific topic at the national level, and identify gaps and reforms needed to improve coherence with existing commitments and policy frameworks.”<sup>2</sup>

National Plans can be developed independently of an MEA, e.g. to publicly announce a country’s support and alignment to the topic and outline plans for action. At the same time, some treaties require National Action Plans in their texts (e.g. Article 5 of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants). Others adopt them as requirements through Conference of the Parties (e.g. the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans under the Convention on Biological Diversity).

While taking a ‘National Plan’ approach to implementing MEAs can be effective, in practice, previous **National Plans have encountered several stumbling blocks that have limited their effectiveness:**

1. Many previous National Plans have consisted of uncoordinated efforts, definitions, and metrics across countries.<sup>3 4</sup> Such isolated and unaligned approaches can result in poor progress towards achieving goals set in MEAs.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Paris Agreement mandated the production of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) without stipulating their content.<sup>3</sup>
2. The low quality and inconsistency of baseline data and evidence used as the foundation for national targets, as well as weakly coordinated monitoring, impede the validation of both national and global progress.<sup>4 6</sup>
3. Limited transparency and accountability mechanisms have resulted in limited evidence being available to measure the effectiveness of implementation.
4. Insufficient funding and legislative support for low-capacity countries has impacted the delivery of the National Plans.<sup>3 4 7</sup>

**In this brief, we suggest ways to overcome these stumbling blocks to ensure National Plans can be successful if used as an implementation measure in the Global Plastics Treaty. We also suggest how this approach could be adopted in the revised zero draft, and outline ingredients for success to ensure that National Plans can drive effective action at the national level.**

## National Plans in the Global Plastics Treaty

Research by the Global Plastics Policy Centre found there is a high chance that a National Plans will be selected as an implementation measure for the Global Plastics Treaty, with 85% of delegate submissions to the first 'Potential Options for Elements' document supporting a National Plans approach.

Given this likelihood, the Centre researched the critical ways in which the current paradigm for National Plans would need to be revised:

### → Five enablers to ensure National Plans are an effective implementation measure in the Global Plastics Treaty

1. National Plans should be supported by national legal and institutional frameworks, with stringent compliance measures at the international treaty level.<sup>9 10 11 12</sup>
2. National targets and measures included in the National Plans should align with those of the MEA.<sup>13</sup>
3. Robust monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and data sharing, including transparency and disclosure should be included as part of the treaty.<sup>12 3</sup>
4. The National Plans should be informed by the latest information and lessons learned, supported by robust research and scientific support in the implementation of the MEA.<sup>14</sup>
5. National Plans require technical and financial assistance along with global cooperation and coordination to ensure successful implementation and compliance.<sup>15 12</sup>

The [revised zero draft](#) for the Global Plastics Treaty is currently unclear in its language describing countries' obligations to design and implement National Plans. One reason may be due to variations in the type of plans proposed, with some calling for National Action Plans, others for National Implementation Plans, or Nationally Determined Contributions. While these differ slightly in their focus, each generally describes a process by which states outline their plans to implement international commitments.

The various options for National Plans suggests that there is no clear agreement among the delegations as to which route will be taken with the implementation of the treaty. So far in the INC process, the statements during and outside INCs have fallen at different points of a spectrum of National Plans-related preferences (Figure 1).

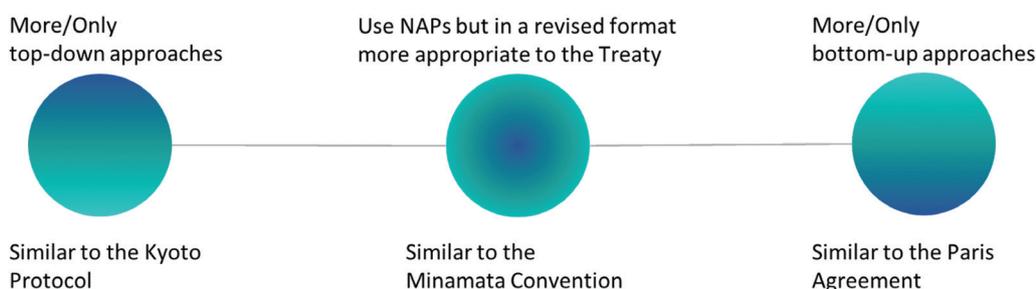


Figure 1. A spectrum of arguments around the use of National Plans

Based on available evidence, a revised National Plan approach in the treaty that adopts the five enablers outlined above would allow for individual country contexts to be considered by national governments without compromising progress towards the treaty's global goals.

## Driving meaningful action at the national level

Once the framework for National Plans is set out in the treaty (if this is the chosen implementation measure), individual countries will have to consider how they will develop and implement them. Drawing from our collaborative experiences of co-developing National Plans with seven government partners, seven essential components for the success of National Plans at the national level have been identified.

**1. Be evidence-based:** Policies included as part of National Plans should be grounded in rigorous research and data analysis that is specific to the country in question. This provides a framework for designing and implementing policies that are transparent, effective, efficient, and equitable. This evidence base should be collected and developed in a way that is efficient, focusing priorities, and taking account of capacity and time-limitations.

Common Seas' approach to developing National Plans is driven by Plastic Drawdown, a rapid-assessment tool that is adaptable to data-poor environments and designed to support decision-making for governments operating in highly resource-constrained contexts. This means our partners can quickly identify the priority problem areas, avoiding lengthy preparatory processes that can often lead to lags in implementation.

**2. Be focused and actionable:** National Plans should avoid being a long wish list of potential actions that can dilute targeted action and over stretch resources. Instead, National Plans should aim to outline highest priority solutions at each stage of the plastics life cycle and indicate how the proposed actions contribute to the targets set out in the treaty. In this way, the National Plans can be focused and actionable, and will allow countries to make more concerted changes. The National Plans can then be revised and adapted over time once the changes have come into effect.

**3. Build on existing initiatives, laws and policies:** National Plans do not need to start from zero, and should incorporate learnings from previous projects, as well as activities occurring under current and upcoming projects, to maximise efficiencies and ensure priorities and resources are aligned with existing commitments. This might involve expanding the scope to consider regional efforts that a country has committed to.

For example, Grenada and Saint Lucia are both part of a trial to explore efficiencies in recycling across neighbouring island nations with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); this will mean that each country might prioritise different aspects of the recycling value chain, so their National Plans should reflect targeted resources as part of a wider effort, rather than developing an entire recycling programme.

**4. Provide an assessment of economic and social impacts of actions:** It is important to include an assessment of the economic and social impacts (particularly for marginalised groups) of proposed strategies within National Plans. This preliminary evaluation allows government stakeholders to gain insight into the potential implications of various policies before conducting more comprehensive cost-benefit analyses. By prioritising policies with both significant plastic pollution reduction potential and notable economic and social benefits, decision-makers can effectively allocate often-constrained resources and focus efforts on initiatives that offer the greatest overall potential impact and ensure a just transition.

**5. Establish a clear process for monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms should be built into National Plans, and be consistent with the M&E requirements of the treaty, in order to track progress and adapt strategies toward achieving national targets and goals. However, in some cases, governments may lack sufficient funding or technical resources to establish robust M&E frameworks. Additionally, a lack of personnel with experience in M&E methodologies and fragmented governance structures may hinder the effective evaluation of the progress of policies and strategies included in the National Plans. As such, support to develop practical, cost-effective and sustainable M&E frameworks with clearly defined governance structures within National Plans can help to ensure that progress is effectively monitored and evaluated.

**6. Include and collaborate with stakeholders:** Identifying national stakeholders and including them in the development of the National Plan is critical to its success. It leverages diverse expertise across the value chain, uses local knowledge and resources, fosters ownership and buy-in amongst impacted groups, promotes coordination and alignment, and enhances the legitimacy and accountability of the plan. Open and inclusive discussions also help to provide clear delineation of responsibilities, even amongst different government departments. This helps to foster ownership and mitigate the risk of fragmented governance structures.

In the Gambia, Common Seas supported the National Environment Agency (NEA) in its regional consultation exercise to present the National Plans to the governors and technical advisory committees of each region in the Gambia for feedback. This is an important prerequisite before the National Plan can be presented to cabinet for approval.

**7. Identify available funding:** in financially constrained environments, the identification and promotion of potential funding sources within National Plans is pivotal in bolstering policy support at the national level. For all actions outlined in National Plans, the long-term costs and financing needs should be clearly articulated from the outset. Facilitating government partners’ awareness of and access to funding sources not only expedites the execution of National Plans but also reinforces the realisation of proposed policies.

A prime example is observed in Barbados, where Common Seas recently supported government access to financing from the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Incubator Fund. This funding has been allocated to establish a dedicated role aimed at initiating the implementation of agreed short-term policies delineated within their National Plan. Such strategic collaborations underscore the significance of proactive funding initiatives in advancing national policy agendas.



Members of the Technical Advisory Committee at the regional consultation in the West Coast Region of the Gambia



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## Moving forward with National Plans in the treaty

The National Plan approach to implementing the Global Plastics Treaty has the potential to be a strong implementation measure to translate international requirements into national action.

**In order to ensure that the National Plan approach is effective, the treaty should:**

- ✓ **Acknowledge previous stumbling blocks that have caused previous National Plan approaches to limit the effectiveness of MEAs.**

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- ✓ **Ensure that the selected National Plan approach adopts the five enablers listed above to allow for national specificity without compromising on progress towards the treaty's global goals.**

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- ✓ **Support and encourage national governments to drive meaningful action at the national level through ambitious and realistic National Plans that align with the global treaty.**

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This policy brief is based on evidence gathered by the Global Plastics Policy Centre, and the experience of developing National Plans with government partners by Common Seas

Get in touch to find out more:

### **Carla Worth**

Policy Lead - Common Seas

[carla@commonseas.com](mailto:carla@commonseas.com)

#### ***About Common Seas:***

We provide governments with tools and technical expertise to gather data, calculate baselines, agree reduction targets, and design National Action Plans to stop plastic pollution.

Our unique, collaborative approach builds capacity and greatly improves national and regional understanding of the plastic problem. It also equips governments with the knowledge and authority to negotiate a robust Global Plastics Treaty. This work is enabled by Plastic Drawdown, a tool we developed in consultation with 24 governments around the world. Plastic Drawdown is endorsed by the United Nations and its methodology was published in the Global Environmental Change Journal. It has been deployed in Barbados, Greece, Grenada, Indonesia, Maldives, the Gambia, and the UK.

### **Antaya March**

Research Lead - Global Plastics Policy Centre

[antaya.march@port.ac.uk](mailto:antaya.march@port.ac.uk)

#### ***About the Global Plastics Policy Centre:***

Based at the University of Portsmouth, UK, the Global Plastics Policy Centre is an independent knowledge broker to support effective plastics policy-making in government and the private sector. The Centre provides evidence-based support at the interface of government, businesses, citizens, and researchers, including supporting the process to develop a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution.

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