

*Evaluating Counter-Measures against Maritime  
Pollution through Waste with Special Regard to  
COVID-19-Pandemic Induced Waste*

# **Committee Guide**

*United Nations Environmental Programme  
Governing Council*

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## 1. Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

welcome to the OLMUN Conference of 2021. My name is Kian Assent and with this being my third year of OLMUN, I am glad to be chairing the United Nations Environmental Programme as my first committee.

Right now I am attending the twelfth grade at the Cäcilienschule and I guess that this is where I would normally describe what I do in my everyday life, but due to the innumerable amounts of limitations, there isn't much to say. I spend most of my time reading, cooking and doing whatever sports are possible, not a lot more going on. But especially because of that I am really looking forward to this event which will definitely bring some variety! OLMUN has always been about the people you spend it with and in times like these where this is the very thing we all seem to miss, I am sure that we will have a great time!

Looking forward to seeing you all and with the kindest regards,  
Kian Assent

Dear delegates,

I am very happy about the fact that our committee will have the committee sessions in presence, and I'm looking forward to seeing all of you.

Now for some personal information about me, I am Lisbeth, 17 years old and currently attending the 12th grade at the Cäcilienschule, just like Kian. In my free time I enjoy reading, playing badminton or acting in a theatre group, which sadly isn't possible during these times. I am also active in the youth organization of a political party.

This will be my first time chairing a committee, but I have gathered some MUN experience from OLMUN 2018 and 2019, as well as from SPIMUN 2019.

I am extra-excited for the conference this year, as it will surely change up all of our day-to-day-lives a little. I hope for this year's conference to be very fun and a good distraction from all the Covid-stress.

Excited to see you all in June and with kind regards,  
Lisbeth Ritterhoff

## 2. Committee Introduction

In June 1972, at the end of the United Nations Conference in Stockholm, the United Nations Environment Programme was brought to life. The goal: Dealing with environmental issues within the system of the United Nations, such as climate change, marine management and the improvement of green economics.

Today its main objectives are heavily defined by the 17 sustainable development goals which were contrived in 2016. By developing international environmental agreements, supporting environmental science and aiding national governments with their own environmental goals, UNEP is active all around the globe on its quest for an environmentally-friendly and sustainable world.

The council debating these issues consists of 58 members in total, which are being elected for a timespan of three years each.

### **3. The Topic and its Problems**

This years conference will concern itself with the issue of maritime pollution through waste while focusing on the newfound problems caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Maritime pollution has been a concerning topic for centuries, hence the importance of finding solutions to prevent it. But not only has it always been relevant, but was its importance further enhanced by the worldwide active pandemic.

All around the globe governments are confronted with unexpected predicaments and difficulties which require unexpected solutions and ways to be dealt with. In the process, matters that have been relevant for years appear to be neglected at times. Tons upon tons of waste are produced in the process of dealing with COVID-19, hence endangering the maritime world of our planet as well as its inhabitants. Because of that, the United Nations Environmental Programme is tasked to find solutions which are defined by one major intention: To relieve the sea in as many ways as possible from the burden upon it and presenting a valid alternative that doesn't weaken the international COVID-19 countermeasures.

But what is it precisely that strains the waters on earth? When it comes to maritime pollution, there are mainly two reoccurring problems: trash and chemicals, both coming with their individually caused harms.

#### **3.1 Trash**

The issue of trash includes all products that where originally manufactured for human usage and ended up being partially or fully dumped into the ocean, This is mostly the result of inattentive waste management but also careless littering of the environment. Since many plastic products can take up to a hundred years for decomposing, the strain brought upon the sea by this is immensely endangering for its inhabitants and the natural ecosystem. An easily visible harmful effect is animals getting caught up in plastic bags or the like. Hundreds of marine species also mistake plastic waste for prey, and then die of starvation, due to their stomachs being filled with plastic.

However there are also less visible effects of trash in the oceans, such as the impact on food and health. When plastic waste is exposed to seawater for a long period of time, toxic

contaminants form on the material's surface, and when ingested by marine species and afterwards humans it can be a potential health hazard.

Therefore, in addition to the animals suffering from this man-made problem, it affects the ones causing it just as much. Fish are harmed by swimming debris and their food is contaminated by micro plastic which will be eaten and taken up into their bloodstream and tissue. When a human comes to eat one of these animals, part of the plastic is taken into his/her own body possibly harming the biological circuits.

### **3.2 Chemicals**

Chemical contamination, another major issue, presents a very different yet equally concerning problem. It includes all kinds of chemicals, reaching from everyday household articles to toxic fertilizers and pesticides. These unnatural resources often end up being washed into the ocean through groundwater that connects to lakes and rivers. There, common components like nitrogen and phosphorus cause intoxicating algal to grow which gravely affect the oceans' wildlife.

And once again this part of maritime pollution is not at all one that doesn't concern the ones who cause it. The water itself consists partially of toxic chemicals, hence making up part of the world around the sea creatures. And after all it is the humans that eat the fish which can contain numerous amounts of poisonous and dangerous substances. We ourselves are suffering from the consequences and should be looking for solutions urgently.

### **3.3 The Pandemic**

Unfortunately this is not all of it. The crisis brought upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic has had unexpected yet major influence on the waste management, hence also concerning the oceans.

Broken supply chains due to road restrictions all around the globe or simply a lack of workforces create pressure on the production sites and let tons of resources go to waste. The rising fear of a possible quarantine also lead the population to buying more and more goods which are packaged in ways to remain consumable for a longer period of time, hence resulting in even more plastic waste produced by the consumers.

In addition to that, rising infections confront us with yet another unusual difficulty. Hazardous waste which is produced by those infected with COVID-19 needs to be properly dealt with and disposed. Alongside to the increasing amounts of this infectious waste, personal protective equipment (PPE in short) such as masks or sanitizers and single-use plastic items used in for things like self-tests further complicate waste disposal and pressure the ones responsible.

An overall difficult situation for each country and loss of focus leads to very poor waste management and further pollution of the already very strained sea and its life forms.

#### **4. Possible Solutions**

Due to its rising acuteness, the topic has not been left undiscussed by the United Nations Environmental Programme. Since it was first addressed in the “London Convention” in 1972 (held by the UNCHE) and the “London Protocol” from 1996, legal efforts to combat maritime pollution have been made, but compliance to the enforced laws has been rather poor. The reason for this is partly the limited financial resources for their enforcement. This is a basic problem which needs a solution in order for the countries to be able to enforce measures. Therefore, financial programs could be necessary.

In 1978, the “MARPOL” was held, concerning the prevention for the pollution from ships, but the same problem emerged here, with the lack of financial resources to implement the laws that the committee agreed on.

In general, the UNEP considers plastic marine debris and its ability to transport harmful substances as one of the main problems affecting our environment.

Achieving a once again nature friendly environment in the ocean is to be accomplished by following two main goals: Prevention and cleanup.

First of all, the pollution of our seas needs to come to a halt and things that are becoming more and more intertwined with our everyday life ought to be rethought. The shipping of an ordered product, packaged goods in a supermarket, plastic bags for transportation or using pesticides to make farming more efficient: All of this adds up to an immense burden on the environment and hence needs to be stopped. Without approaching the roots of the problem, a solution can never be found.

Therefore, to encourage the industries to stop creating waste, the governments and the industries need to work together to redesign products from material, over processing all the way to its transportation. For example, synthetic fabrics could be reduced, or the industries could be discouraged to use them.

To implement sustainable measures with the citizens, recycling and reusing could be encouraged by for example adding recycling bins everywhere in the cities and rural areas. This way, cyclical use of resources is a lot more appealing. Other solutions could also be provided by new technologies. If governments invested in research and innovation, alternatives for plastic or toxic chemicals could be found and further production of trash could be prevented.

But even if further pollution is to be stopped effectively, a cleanup will still be required to help the environment in its regenerative process. Currently the ocean is filled with roughly 269 thousand tons of plastic. And the pollution has already reached an unrecoverable level for the nature on its own. Therefore, finding ways of clearing out massive batches of plastic and extracting chemicals from the sea is essential in the process of combatting

maritime pollution. Here there are also many technological possibilities that could be helpful. Therefore, once again, governmental investments could help speed up this process and there are also many young companies who use the trash from the oceans to create new products.

These are all possible solutions to the problem, which, if they were all fully or even only partly implemented, could have a great effect on this global problem.

## **5. Some Further Advice**

Please note that while these informations will prove to be a good starting point for your research, they should not be your only source. Further insight on a topic of such complexity can be found all over the internet and we highly encourage you to do some individual searching on your own, especially concerning your Policy Statements and Draft Resolutions. By doing so you will not only gain a better understanding of it, but it will also help you at refining and strengthening your country's position.

But that's about it from us. If there are any more issues developing over time, feel free to contact us at [unep@olmun.org](mailto:unep@olmun.org) or alternatively have a look at the very detailed Handbook which you can find on the official OLMUN page in the internet. This will also provide you with some rather useful advice concerning the Rules of Procedure and is therefore definitely worth reading. Hopefully you'll have a lot fun preparing for our committee sessions and are looking forward to this year's conference as much as we do.

Yours sincerely,  
Kian Assent and Lisbeth Ritterhoff

## **6. Possibly Helpful Sources**

PEW: Plastic Pollution affecting the Sea Life

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/09/24/plastic-pollution-affects-sea-life-throughout-the-ocean>

IMO: The London Convention and Protocol:

<https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/Pages/London-Convention-Protocol.aspx>

National Geographic: Maritime Pollution

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/critical-issues-marine-pollution>

Greenpeace: Prevention of Plastic Pollution

<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/oceans/preventing-plastic-pollution/>

Coronavirus disease 2019 induced waste scenario

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213343720310095>

The impact of COVID-19 on Consumer Food Waste

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/aepp.13079>