

WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution (DPP)

Statement by the Forum on Trade, Environment, & the SDGs (TESS)
DPP Plenary
26 January 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to intervene this morning.

TESS congratulates Members on the revised draft of the Ministerial Statement for MC13 and list of compilations. Overall, we view these as very positive steps forward. It also underscores the high importance that DPP members have accorded to the issue of plastic pollution and the role that trade-related cooperation can play in addressing this global challenge.

We recognize the hard work of co-convenors and Members to keep their eye on the goal of doing something effective and meaningful here at the WTO, while also recognizing the complex set of challenges at hand. We think the statement represents a positive spirit of compromise, reflecting both the ambition and political will to work together as well as a balance of the views of all DPP Members and inputs provided by stakeholders. We are encouraged by the commitment to the DPP expressed by Ambassadors this morning and encourage you to sustain the level of ambition.

On the Ministerial Statement specifically, the statement makes clear that the DPP process can and intends to both complement and contribute to the INC process on an international legally binding instrument without prejudging it. We are also pleased that the draft statement notes the UNEA resolution's call "to continue and step-up activities, and adopt voluntary measures, to combat plastic pollution" while the INC negotiations are underway and the DPP is one of the venues through which this can happen.

The discussions in the DPP and findings from the survey on trade-related plastics measures highlight that trade policies are already an important part of the toolkit being used to address plastic pollution in both developed and developing WTO Members. Discussions within the DPP provide opportunities for WTO Members to show *how* it is possible to take trade-related action in ways that are ambitious and address wider sustainable development concerns, including those from developing countries, and to advance cooperation and concrete outcomes. Such action and cooperation can feed into INC negotiations and also be accelerated and reinforced by the outcomes of those negotiations.

TESS also appreciates that the Ministerial Statement provides for further updating the compilation lists periodically based on global, regional, and domestic efforts and outcomes, as well as technical and scientific developments and any results of the INC negotiations.

Looking ahead, TESS welcomes the intention of DPP Members, noted in the Ministerial Statement, to work to update a workplan in the months following MC13 and to look for further concrete, pragmatic, and effective outcomes on these actions and understandings at the latest by MC14. To realize this commitment, it will be vital that the format, agenda of meetings, questions for discussion, and other work in the workplan are designed specifically to foster such outcomes.

As the post-MC13 workplan is developed, TESS also encourages members to include focused discussions on topics or issues that may be of particular interest to developing countries, including least developed countries and small-island developing states. These could include, for instance, deep-dive sessions focused specifically on concrete options for trade-related cooperation and collective action on particular challenges (such as specific non-plastic substitutes, single-use plastics, and problematic packaging such as sachets) as well as particular Aid for Trade needs and partnership opportunities. Such deep-dive sessions could also focus on case examples from specific countries and involve stakeholders from the private sector or NGOs that are engaged at the country level in relevant efforts to tackle plastic pollution and in the transformation of related supply chains. Sessions could also focus on updating members on specific recent national and regional trade-related policy developments and innovations that are relevant to discussions here at the DPP. In addition, we support the proposal by Norway for a webinar to inform the INC negotiation process on the evidence and insights on trade and trade-related measures gathered through the DPP process.

As suggested in our statement last year at the DPP pre-plenary, we also propose that it would send a valuable signal if, alongside the Ministerial Statement at MC13, a number of DPP Members seized MC13 as an occasion to reference specific trade-related actions and cooperation to tackle plastic pollution that they are taking or considering individually or together with other Members. Ministers could, for instance, provide examples of such actions in their interventions at the Ministerial Conference, in their press statements, or at the press conference, which would help to illustrate engagement and commitment to concrete action.

From our side, a quick update is that TESS is also organizing a panel alongside MC13 in collaboration with Pew, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), and UNCTAD on “Fostering Trade-Related Cooperation on Plastic Pollution: The Dialogue on Plastic Pollution beyond MC13” at the IISD Trade + Sustainability Hub. The panel aims to complement the DPP press briefing and to engage the wider stakeholder community at MC13. We have invited high-level speakers from each of the DPP co-convenors to provide remarks and hope that at least a couple of them will be able to join, alongside experts from WTO Secretariat and a wider community of stakeholders. All of those at MC13 are invited to attend the panel session, which will also be live streamed.

A further update is that in the coming weeks TESS will be organizing a seminar with experts at the World Customs Organization (WCO) on potential plastics-related Harmonized System (HS) amendments under review at WCO sub-committee meetings in May and September 2024. We continue to urge all DPP and INC Members to actively engage and coordinate with their customs administration counterparts on the WCO’s ongoing HS amendments process.

A final note is that TESS will publish, just after MC13, a policy brief with QUNO titled “The Role of Trade Policy Cooperation in the Promotion of Environmentally Sound and Safe Plastic Waste Management Technologies and Services.” We look forward to opportunities to share the analysis with participants in the DPP.

We thank you again for the opportunity and wish you all a productive and successful MC13!