

Draft Statement by the Forum on Trade, Environment, & the SDGs (TESS)

WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (DPP)

Pre-Plenary
23 November 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to intervene this morning. To begin, TESS would like to welcome Dhinesh from the Australian mission and congratulates him on his new appointment in Geneva. We also welcome Anas from the Moroccan mission in his new role as co-coordinator.

TESS welcomes the revised draft of the possible Ministerial Statement for MC13. Overall, we see it as a commendable revised draft. We acknowledge the hard work of coordinators to reflect the views of the diversity of Members of the DPP and to produce a text that reflects a balance of their views. We also appreciate the opportunity provided to stakeholders to contribute to this process and are pleased to provide some brief comments today.

First, we think the statement will serve an important role in signalling momentum and the willingness of Members to continue collective work at the WTO on the nexus of trade and plastic pollution, and to contribute to international cooperation on plastic pollution. It is especially good to see the interest in ongoing work on each of the workstreams, which is part of the balance reflected in the Ministerial Statement that launched this Dialogue.

We welcome the way in which the draft Ministerial Statement reflects and affirms an evolution of the work of the DPP. As you will recall, at MC12 the statement focused on identifying issues for potential cooperation and collective action. Here, in your draft statement, there is not only a willingness to continuing exploring and identifying interlinkages between plastic pollution and trade, but also **agreement on the importance** of international cooperation on a **set of actions**, as well as an agreement to **pursue such actions** on a voluntary basis, individually, and collectively, while recognizing different domestic capacities and priorities for action. This is important progress and we think it is excellent that the statement captures this evolution.

Taken as a whole, the statement and accompanying compilation shows that the DPP has provided a valuable space for WTO Members to review experiences, identify areas of convergence, and incubate ideas for collective action and partnerships. It also highlights that discussions and ideas for collective action fostered at the WTO can support, complement, and inform the negotiations for a new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution. Critically, it also shows that the DPP is providing a valuable place to foster dialogue between environment and trade ministries working on different aspects of the nexus of trade, supply chains, and plastic pollution.

Second, we think the open, illustrative, non-exhaustive, and evolving compilation of suggestions, practices, options, and opportunities are a valuable effort to capture the collective substantive technical work and discussions of the Dialogue in the three workstreams. The compilation highlights the value-added and contribution that the DPP is making to international discussions

on tackling plastic pollution, so we encourage you to find ways to reference this work in the Ministerial Statement. That said, we recognize that for each of the compilations, there are important issues for further reflection, and that warrant consultation with environmental colleagues. Nonetheless, we think these compilations provide a useful substantive reference point for ongoing conversation, including on important questions some delegations have noted around topics like effective and environmentally sound and safe non-plastic substitutes and alternative plastics, and on different options for trade-related action and cooperation.

Third, we highlight the importance of ensuring the statement retains the emphasis on identifying practices, options, and opportunities for trade-related cooperation of particular interest to developing Members, including LDCs, SVEs, and SIDS, and opportunities for MSMEs.

On that note, we appreciate the reference to international cooperation on action to address trade-related capacity building and technical assistance needs of developing Members, least-developed Members and small-island developing States, including through the implementation of Aid for Trade to address plastic pollution. We note, with particular interest, the reference to the proposed launching of a mechanism to match existing funding opportunities with specific needs identified by developing Members, particularly LDCs, SVEs, and SIDS, to implement trade-related policies and measures to tackle plastic pollution. We would welcome further information regarding this mechanism, and based on our existing work on Aid for Trade and plastic pollution, would be pleased to provide inputs as your work on that topic advances.

Finally, we greatly appreciate that the latest revised version of the Ministerial Statement includes reference to the development of a new DPP workplan in the months following MC13, and that it references that Members will seek further concrete, pragmatic, and effective outcomes on these actions and understandings at the latest by MC14. Ideally that workplan could be developed and discussed early next year so that members can swiftly move towards advancing their work after MC13. We agree that it would be important, in this regard, to continue to seek synergies with the process and results of the INC negotiations on the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

While emphasizing the desire to support the plastics treaty process, we also need to be mindful that the UNEA resolution that launched the plastics treaty negotiations clearly underlined that governments should not “wait” for the treaty to be concluded in order to take action. Rather, the resolution emphasized the urgent need for countries to advance action now, alongside the negotiations, which in turn can support the political momentum and outcomes of the treaty.

As suggested at previous meetings of the DPP, we also think it would send a valuable signal if, alongside the Ministerial Statement, a number of DPP members seized MC13 as an occasion to reference specific trade-related actions 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 or in other statements at the Ministerial Conference, which would help to illustrate engagement and commitment to concrete action.

To support the DPP, TESS is pleased to highlight a policy paper and a policy brief that we hope members and stakeholders will find useful. The policy paper, co-published with the ISO, titled “Standards and Related Initiatives in International Cooperation to End Plastic Pollution: Mapping and State of Play” is intended to inform discussion on the relevance of international cooperation on standards to trade-related efforts to end plastic pollution.

The policy brief is titled “Options for Trade-related Cooperation on Problematic and Avoidable Plastics: Building on Existing Experiences with Single-Use Plastics.” It aims to inform discussion on options for trade-related cooperation and action on single-use plastics that could be pursued through the negotiations on an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution as well as here at the DPP, among other fora.

In addition, we will be publishing in the coming two weeks a policy brief jointly with QUNO titled “The Role of Trade Policy Cooperation in the Promotion of Environmentally Sound and Safe Plastic Waste Management Technologies and Services.” The policy brief examines the role of trade and technology transfer in supporting environmentally sound and safe plastic waste management. Its focus is on the downstream area of plastic waste management: prevention, recycling, clean-up, remediation, and disposal. To support discussion in the DPP, the policy brief includes annexes that compile illustrative examples of categories of plastic waste management technologies and services with their relevant HS and CPC codes, emphasizing the importance of discussion on this topic being guided by the guidelines on environmentally sound waste management developed in the context of the Basel Convention.

TESS papers, once published, are accessible on the TESS website. If you have any difficulties in accessing them or would like to receive a pdf copy, please do not hesitate to contact me at: maresh.sugathan@graduateinstitute.ch.

Finally, a reminder to all that the WCO committee responsible for HS amendments will be meeting next week in Brussels, including on a number of specific possible HS amendments that are relevant to the goal of reducing plastic pollution. We encourage Members to spur their customs colleagues to engage in that committee next week.

We thank you again for the opportunity.