



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat
to : Delegations

Subject : 'Plastic Soup' – The problem of plastic marine debris in the oceans
- Information from the Dutch delegation

Delegations will find annexed a note from the Dutch delegation on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 21 October 2009.

‘Plastic Soup’ - The problem of plastic marine debris in the oceans

Plastic is a material we can no longer do without. We are aware of some of its harmful effects, but have some way to go before we understand the complete picture.

We have known for some time that there is least one vast floating mass of waste in the Pacific Ocean, most of which is plastic. This is known as ‘plastic soup’. It has recently been confirmed that there is a similar expanse in the Atlantic Ocean.

The full extent of the problem is still unknown. The drifting mass of plastic and rubber in the Pacific Ocean alone occupies an area roughly 34 times the size of the Netherlands.

The presence of vast quantities of plastic waste in the marine environment is something we should be worried about, because plastic usually takes a very long time to degrade. Once it has broken down into tiny parts it also constitutes a threat to marine ecosystems (marine mammals, fish, birds and lower animals) worldwide. The chemicals that are in plastic and that bond to plastic constitute the biggest problem.

The scope and complexity of ‘plastic soup’ is such that there are no simple solutions. It is important we clear up the existing waste, but even more important that we prevent plastic from ending up in the sea in the first place. We need to ensure that the plastic cycle is closed as much as possible. More international research is required; indeed, this is an international problem that can only be tackled internationally. And the first step is increasing international awareness.

That is why the Netherlands has already raised this issue within the UNEP framework, and why we want to take the opportunity to raise the profile of ‘plastic soup’ at this Environment Council and reflect on possible ways of tackling the problem with other Member States. The Netherlands would like to ask the Commission to investigate possible responses to this problem, and urges other Member States to contribute ideas.