



Do you feel uneasy when you buy a coffee in a takeaway plastic cup? Perhaps you feel awkward buying that bottle of water?

We hope so, because raising awareness of what plastic waste is doing to our oceans, our wildlife and ourselves is what UN Environment's #CleanSeas campaign has been all about since its launch in February 2017.

We've given ourselves five years to build a global movement to tackle the excessive use of single-use plastics and get rid of dangerous microplastics in our toiletries and cosmetics.

The tide is already beginning to turn. Just over a year since the launch, 43 governments – accounting for more than half the world's coastline – have signed up to the #CleanSeas campaign with many making specific commitments to protect oceans, encourage recycling and cut back on single-use plastics.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DEc16dEMns&t=3s>

Across the world, individuals have been inspired by #CleanSeas to re-evaluate their use of plastic and they are now pushing their governments and the private sector to deliver bold pollution-beating policies.

Nearly 80,000 people have taken the #CleanSeas pledge to eradicate single-use plastics and microbeads from their lives. From Bali to Panama, they are cleaning beaches, cataloguing what they find, and changing their own behaviour by, for example, using cloth bags and carrying steel cups or cutlery with them, refusing plastic straws and demanding the removal of plastic cups or single-use bottles from their offices.

The scale of the problem demands a global response. Every year, around 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans, poisoning our fish, birds and other sea creatures. That's the equivalent of one garbage truck of litter being dumped into the sea every minute. In April, a sperm whale was found dead on the southern coast of Spain and an autopsy revealed that it was killed by the 29 kilos of plastic found in its stomach. This, unfortunately, is not a unique case.

#CleanSeas first priority was to highlight the scale of the problem and the message has been heard loud and clear.



The Clean Seas campaign was launched at an event in Bali, Indonesia in February 2017. (UN Environment/Flickr)

Tens of thousands of people have visited our website [cleanseas.org](https://www.cleanseas.org) to learn more, while thousands of people are using #CleanSeas and #beatpollution on Twitter and Instagram to tag pictures of beach clean-ups and to urge their friends and followers to join the fight against marine litter.

The incredible team of the *Turn the Tide on Plastic* yacht, which is competing in the round-the-world [Volvo Ocean Race](#), is also spreading the message as it battles its way through this difficult course. Sailed by the youngest and only mixed-gender crew ever to compete in the race's 45-year history, *Turn the Tide on Plastic* is battling it out against six other boats across four of the world's five oceans.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sgDhBSaZ5g>

And in Kenya, [the Flipflopi Project](#) is building a 60-foot traditional dhow from plastic waste collected on the beaches of Lamu Island to raise awareness along Africa's eastern coast.

The global conversation we need is underway but there is much more to do. Over the next five years, #CleanSeas aims to create an unstoppable momentum towards a truly circular global economy. That means valuing what we use and thinking harder about how we use, and reuse, products.

"Our aim is to redefine the world's relationship with plastics because that is the only way to save our seas. Only by fundamentally transforming the way we consume can we secure the oceans that sustain human life," said Erik Solheim, UN Environment's Executive Director. "What we need is a revolution."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOpR5tBy2PI>

By the end of March, 42 countries from Brazil to Belgium and from the Maldives to Iceland had signed up to the #CleanSeas campaign, with many making firm commitments on everything from creating marine reserves to adopting national plans on recycling and waste management.

Here are some of the pledges that have already been made:

- Belgium, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Panama and the Philippines are drawing up or adopting national plans and legislation to combat marine litter.
- Canada, which has the world's longest coastline, is funding community-based programmes, like beach clean-ups, and continuing critical research into the impact of microplastics. It is also drawing up regulations to ban the manufacture and sale of toiletries containing microbeads.
- Indonesia has committed to reduce plastic waste by 70 per cent by 2030
- Kenya, Jordan, Madagascar, Chile and France have banned or pledged to ban single-use or non-biodegradable plastic bags.
- Israel aims to have 70 per cent of its beaches clean 70 per cent of the time this year and is implementing a ban on certain types of plastic bags.
- Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden have committed to implement the "Nordic programme" on a sustainable approach to plastics by preventing plastic waste, encouraging recycling and promoting a circular economy
- New Zealand has committed to ban products containing plastic. microbeads from June and is developing options to get rid of single-use plastic bags.

The #CleanSeas campaign will monitor these promises and look to get more countries to commit to action. But governments cannot fight this battle alone.

Businesses are acutely aware of the popular awakening over plastics and they are responding: European retailers have committed to plastic-free aisles and products while some restaurants have pledged to phase out plastic straws.

The private sector is key to success. It is home to the innovators, cutting-edge designers and thought leaders who can effect long-lasting, tangible change in consumer habits and product design.



Rethinking the way we produce and use plastic is key to addressing the marine litter crisis. (Pixabay)

DELL has teamed up with advocacy foundation Lonely Whale and others to form an open-source initiative to look at developing the first commercial-scale, ocean-bound plastics supply chain. Dell itself is using plastics collected from beaches, waterways and coastal areas to create packaging for its laptops.

Over the next year, #CleanSeas will be reinforcing its key business and institutional partnerships with DELL, the Volvo Ocean Race, the 11th Hour Racing, Musto, Lonely Whale, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Phuket Hotels Association. We will reach out to more companies to harness their expertise in our bid to promote a sustainable, circular global economy.

"It is beyond time to permanently decouple economic development from environmental degradation and we want to work with the brightest minds in industry and business to achieve that," said Solheim. "The next few years will decide who are the global leaders in new technology and materials. This is a great opportunity for those who dare to dream."

Learn more about UN Environment's [Clean Seas campaign](#).

Here are the countries that had joined the campaign as of April 2018: Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, France, Grenada, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, the Maldives, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, United Kingdom, Uruguay

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