



Green Note, May 1 2024: Focus on Plastics Production

In the last few days you may have seen media reports of an international conference held in Ottawa with the aim of reducing carbon emissions and pollution from plastic. (Many thanks to Heather Rankin for keeping this process in our minds.)

The Global Plastics Treaty is an effort by the United Nations [Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee](#) on Plastics Pollution to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The fourth session of talks (INC-4) took place from 23rd to 29th April 2024 at the Shaw Center in Ottawa, Canada. The final meeting, INC-5, will be later this year, in Busan, South Korea.

Delegates who traveled to Ottawa included those from communities affected by plastic manufacturing and pollution. Louisiana and Texas residents who live near petrochemical plants and refineries handed out postcards aimed at the U.S. State Department saying, "Wish you were here." Members of an Indigenous Peoples' Caucus held a news conference to tell how microplastics are contaminating their food supply and the pollution threatens their communities and ways of life guaranteed to them in perpetuity, but that they felt their voices weren't being heard.

But lobbyists representing fossil fuel and petrochemical companies also attended, in larger numbers than ever before. The 196 lobbyists registered for the talks represent a 37% increase from the 143 lobbyists registered at the last talks, in Nairobi, which in turn was a 36% increase on the previous year's number.

One of the most contentious topics concerns the quantity of plastic manufactured. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels and chemicals, and plastic-producing countries and companies and oil and gas exporters have been strongly objecting to treaty language that restricts how much plastic is produced. Increased plastic production is a major part of the fossil fuel industry's plans for the future, and attempts to reduce production threaten its profits.

INC-4 talks ended on Monday with no agreement on a proposal for global reductions in the [US\\$712bn plastic production](#) industry by 2040 to address the twin issues of plastic waste and carbon emissions. A group of countries, including Australia, Denmark, Nigeria, Portugal, the Netherlands and Nigeria, signed a declaration, "[the Bridge to Busan](#)", calling for a reduction the production of primary plastic polymers. The US and Canada did not sign the proposal to cut plastic production, and the conference ended without resolution on this subject.

Canada is the world's 4th largest oil producer and oil exporter. Canada's response to calls to limit plastic production has been hesitant. In an interview, Canada's Environment Minister, Steven Guilbeault commented, "I'm just not sure how we would do it. And I think there are other ways of achieving a goal like that without going through what could be a very difficult and not too constructive process." Greenpeace, whose delegation to INC-4 represented more than a dozen countries, has called Guilbeault's stance "waffling," and offers us an opportunity to make our opinions known to Prime Minister Trudeau and Environment Minister Guilbeault [here](#). INC-4 may be over, but INC-5 is still to come, and there is time to make your views known.

Thank you for working to better understand this difficult problem and the choices that face us.

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