



apwC
ASIA PACIFIC
WASTE
CONSULTANTS

PLASTIC WASTE FREE ISLANDS

Synthesis of Plastic Pollution Policies

Vanuatu



Current status of the country

The Republic of Vanuatu is a large island nation in the Melanesian (southwest) Pacific Ocean, consisting of 83 islands spread across 682,220 km² with a population of 266,555. In 2018, more than US\$9 million worth of plastic and rubber goods were imported into Vanuatu, predominantly from East Asia and the Pacific. Australia, New Zealand, China, New Caledonia and France are some of the most relevant exporters of plastics to Vanuatu. Similarly, Vanuatu's plastics and rubber are exported mainly to Australia, New Caledonia and Fiji. In 2018, approximately 4,700 tonnes of plastics were imported.

International relations

The Republic of Vanuatu joined the United Nations (UN) and Pacific Forum Secretariat (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, PIFS) in 1980. Vanuatu is also a member of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Maritime Organization (IMO, 1986), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Commonwealth (2012) and Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF, 2013) and UN World Trade Organization (UNWTO).

Policy measures

The Republic of Vanuatu has adopted and developed several legislative documents about waste management, environmental pollution and protection at an international, regional and national level. Vanuatu has also developed several national legislations and policies that address solid waste management and control of pollution. The Department of Environment and Pollution Control (DEPC) has developed the National Environment Policy and Implementation Plan (NEPIP) 2016–2030, which aligns with the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) and the regional Cleaner Pacific 2025 strategy.

In 2020, Vanuatu developed a National Plastics Strategy 2020–2030. The strategy outlines five main goals: Reduce, Replace, Remediate, Re-capture, and Reward. The current document is still in its draft form, with the final version awaiting publication. Consequently, Vanuatu's government (Waste Management Regulation Order 15) has made several commitments toward reducing plastic waste and preventing it from entering the environment.

Roles and responsibilities

Waste management in Vanuatu is the responsibility of multiple stakeholders, including the Vanuatu government, international partners, private entities and local groups. Traditionally, local governments oversaw managing solid wastes. Thus, with the ever-increasing waste disposal rates, various institutions have become involved in one or more aspects of the management chain, especially awareness-raising and outreach, recycling and recovery regulations, and source reduction by intervention at production and consumption levels. In addition, there are several governmental bodies in Vanuatu with responsibilities for waste management.

Local governments (i.e. municipalities and provincial governments) have responsibility for solid waste management within their local areas, as laid down by the regulatory framework of each municipality or province.

They provide household waste collection and recycling services, manage and operate landfill sites, and deliver education and awareness programmes. On each of the main islands, municipal solid waste (MSW) is managed by the municipal councils of the largest cities.

Waste management situational analysis

Bouffa Sanitary Landfill has been upgraded to a semi-aerobic landfill. However, the remaining areas of Vanuatu rely on insufficiently and inappropriately managed dumpsites, which can be considered potential sources of plastic leakage as a **large proportion of the rural population has no waste services available**.

Waste management budget and levies

Vanuatu has no solid waste management budget at the national or provincial level. Instead, waste management operations are funded through several channels, such as user pays, system fees obtained from waste collection services, property tax or tipping fees, and fines for littering and waste burning.

Resource recovery and recycling

Plastic recycling is still non-existent in Vanuatu, although aggregation and stockpiling exist. The collection of recyclable goods in Vanuatu occurs through waste pickers or landfill scavengers, who play a major role in recycling, as this activity presents an easy and steady flow of income. Therefore, many people are venturing into this business, and even more, sellers would be present if markets were available within the municipality. Furthermore, the extension of collection services to the other islands would capture more significant quantities of recyclable materials.

Legislation – Plastic ban

Since 2018 Vanuatu has banned several single-use plastic items of priority for reducing plastic pollution, such as shopping bags, polystyrene takeaway boxes and plastic straws. Exceptions to the ban include plastic bags to wrap fish or meat at the point of sale and plastic straws that are an integral part of a product's packaging. There was a **90% reduction in lightweight**, single-use plastic bag usage in 2020 compared to 2018.

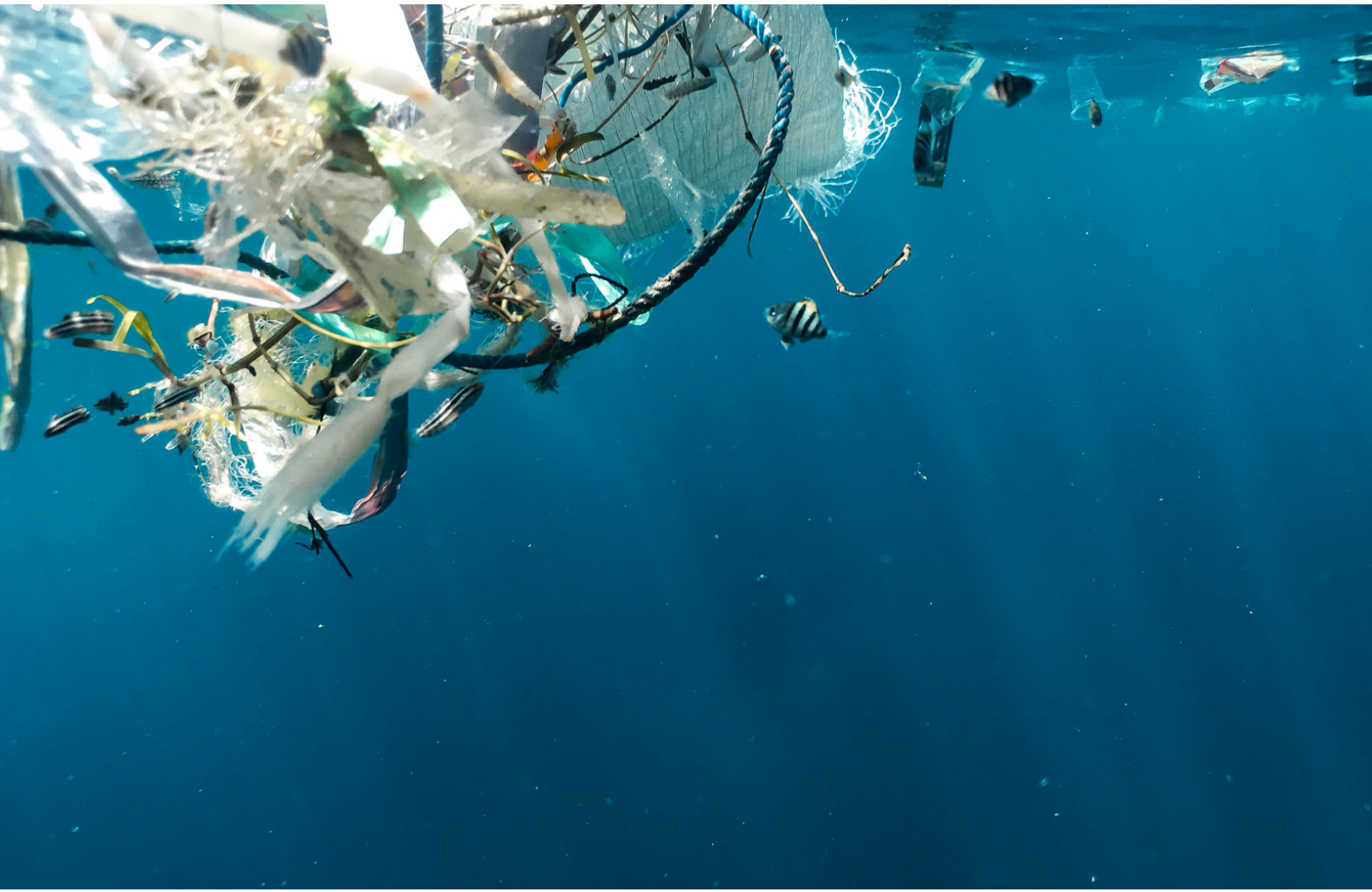
Waste disposal by sectors

In 2019, the overall plastic waste disposal rate across all the sectors – household, commercial, tourism and fisheries, was approximately 2,000 tonnes per year. The most common plastic items disposed of are single-use soft plastic packaging (LDPE), PET water bottles, and Styrofoam packaging (PS).

Plastic represented 1% of household waste disposal (10,000 tonnes/year), predominately takeaway containers and other household items. However, the most common type of plastic disposed of by commercial businesses was single-use plastic packaging (LDPE).

The tourism sector disposes of 2,600 tonnes of waste per year; 246 tonnes are plastics. Land-based accommodation is responsible for 85% of the tourism sector's waste disposal, predominately PET (30%).

The fisheries sector disposed of 233 tonnes of waste, of which 66 tonnes are plastics (most common plastic water bottles). The sector contributes to 3.3% of all plastic waste generated in Vanuatu. Roughly 6.3 tonnes of fishing gear are lost at sea each year based on imported fishing gear.



Key gaps and recommendations

**All sectors:
Lack of waste
segregation and
recycling.**

Implement legislation and associated best practice guidelines to establish compulsory source segregation and disposal of recyclables.

All sectors should conduct source segregation to ensure organics and plastics are recovered. The waste separation will decrease the volume of waste in the landfill, increase its lifespan, and decrease leakage into the environment.

Tourism facilities are not encouraged to segregate waste. Therefore, implement source segregation at tourist locations such as air and seaports, tourist attractions and accommodation. Encouraging the use of reusable materials in tourist accommodation facilities could further reduce waste going to landfills. For example, single-use toiletries should be replaced with refillable containers. Besides, hotels and resorts could install water- refilling stations and ban single-use plastic water bottles. A licensing system should be implemented, where only hotels and resorts with effective waste reduction and management practices get a licence renewal.

Implement container deposit legislation (CDL) or an extended producer levy system to capture other recyclable material.

IUCN strongly suggests that the government financially supports recycling initiatives through a Container Deposit Levy (CDL) system. A Deposit Return System ensures 1) that plastic bottles that are currently going to the landfill are collected and sent for recycling; 2) bottles that leak into the environment are reduced. Given that PET is one of the main items lost to the environment, implementing a container-related initiative, such as a CDL, could place a value on plastic PET bottles and prevent leakage. It has been assumed that a CDL achieves approximately 80% recovery on the containers destined for leakage. Besides, implementing a CDL system could provide additional income, employment opportunities and waste management solutions to the overall solid waste management systems. In addition a system such as CDL, Advance Recycling Fee (ARF), Advance Disposal Fee (ADF), and an affordable user-pay system can be implemented. CDL collection bins should be accessible, especially for fishing marinas located considerable distances from the main city areas. A special retrieval program for fishing nets should be implemented to prevent abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear.

Household and commercial sector: Lack of waste collection service and formal disposal sites in rural areas.

Collection services should be extended to rural and remote areas.

Reliable waste collection services are only available to communities living within metropolitan areas (capital cities and major urban centres). Most people living on city fringes in peri-urban and regional, rural communities, including outer islands, lack formal waste collection services. Several critical issues with the generation and disposal of solid waste in Vanuatu, including plastic waste. The provision of waste services should be prioritised, including improving existing services in more populated areas and providing services in rural, remote and less populated areas. Remote communities have access to plastic goods, particularly food packaging, but no formalised disposal is available. For this reason, dumping, burying and burning remain the most common disposal practices.

Tourism sector: Ports in Vanuatu do not accept waste.

Develop formal specific plans or policies for managing waste from cruise ships, yachts and aeroplanes.

Tourism is the dominant industry in Vanuatu, and the plastic waste generated by the sector is extensive. In particular, cruise ships produce large amounts of waste. Despite this, ports in Vanuatu do not accept waste (except dry waste in some instances). Vanuatu is a signatory to MARPOL and can accept cruise ship waste. However, under a regional agreement brokered by SPREP, most ship-generated waste is diverted to Fiji.

Fisheries sector: There are currently no guidelines for the marking of fishing gear.

Implement an ID system for fishing gear and reporting/tracking/recovery of lost gear through the current fishing licences.

Developing a fishing-gear recapture scheme to financially incentivise fishers to retain and surrender damaged and/or lost fishing gear for recovery. A compulsory tracking method for fishing gear should be implemented for all equipment that poses a danger to marine life and traffic (i.e. nets, mobile FADs, fish traps). In addition, all lost gear should be reported. These schemes should be implemented using a gear ID and recovery system as a requirement for a fishing licence. A detailed waste management plan should also be part of the conditions for a fisheries licence. Port authorities should provide facilities for fisherfolk to repair and store nets to discourage overboard dumping.



Conclusions

Several PICs are investigating the viability of establishing a regional recycling hub (Scoping Study for the Regional Recycling Network for the Western and Eastern Pacific Region) whereby recyclable material from several PICs can be collated. This reduces the significant challenge of moving materials to external markets, mainly due to low trade volumes and low international market values, by increasing economies of scale and bargaining power. Samoa's private recycling sector is more developed than in other PICs and Caribbean SIDS and forms a solid foundation to expand further and develop plastic waste recycling practices.

IUCN strongly suggests that the government financially supports recycling initiatives through a Container Deposit Levy (CDL) system.

Using the above gaps and recommendations, Vanuatu should consider prioritising and assessing the costs and benefits of each recommendation and its potential for impact. Implementation of the recommendations listed here should be the first set of priorities for the country. Although the detailed report listed many more, those in this summary are deemed by IUCN to be the most important and will yield the best results for each of the three sectors.

The designation of geographical entities in this book, and the presentation of the material, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IUCN or other participating organisations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of IUCN or other participating organisations. IUCN is pleased to acknowledge the support of its Framework Partners who provide core funding: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland; Government of France and the French Development Agency (AFD); the Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea; the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad); the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Department of State. This publication has been made possible by funding from Norad, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Published by: IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

Produced by: IUCN Centre for Conservation Action – Ocean Team

Copyright: © 2022 IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Reproduction of this publication for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorised without prior written permission from the copyright holder provided the source is fully acknowledged. Reproduction of this publication for resale or other commercial purposes is prohibited without prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Unsplash

Editor: Mireia Villalonga

Layout by: Mireia Villalonga