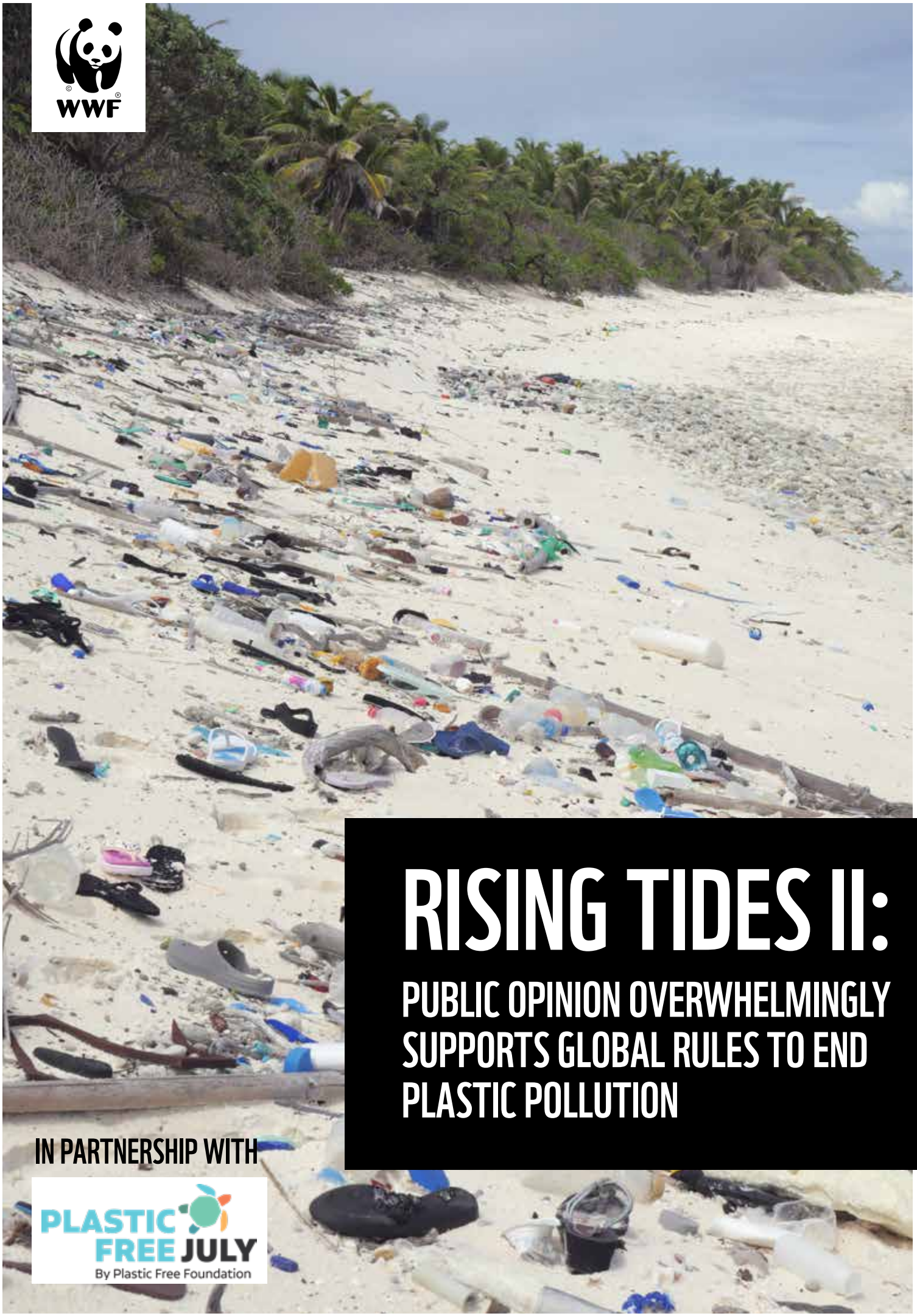


RISING TIDES II:

PUBLIC OPINION OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTS GLOBAL RULES TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

PLASTIC FREE JULY
By Plastic Free Foundation

Publisher:

WWF International and the Plastic Free Foundation

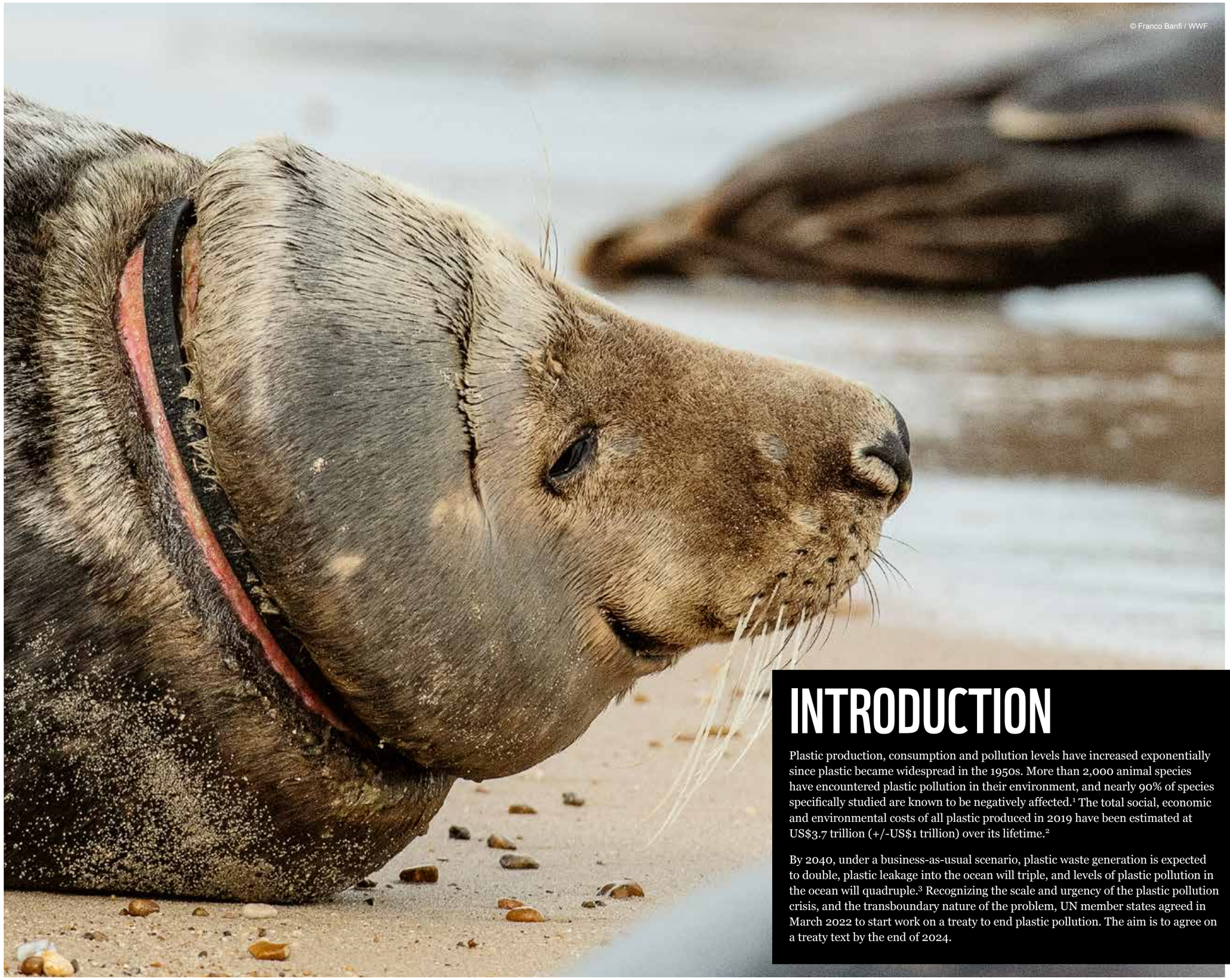
Date: November 2022

WWF is an independent conservation organization, with over 30 million followers and a global network active in nearly 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

The Plastic Free Foundation is a not-for-profit global social movement of over 100 million people that stops around 300 million kgs of plastic polluting the world each year. Through advocacy and initiatives like our Plastic Free July® challenge, we share plastic free solutions with people and organizations so that we can all take action to end plastic waste and enjoy a healthy world.

Design: Ender Ergün-Hakan Lokanoğlu

Cover Photo: Plastic pollution on beach (South Island, Cocos Keeling Islands, Indian Ocean Territories, Australia) © Silke Stuckenbrock / WWF-Australia
Cover Photo: Hermit crab using an aerosol lid as its home, at Chesterfield Reef, New Caledonia © Silke Stuckenbrock / WWF-Australia

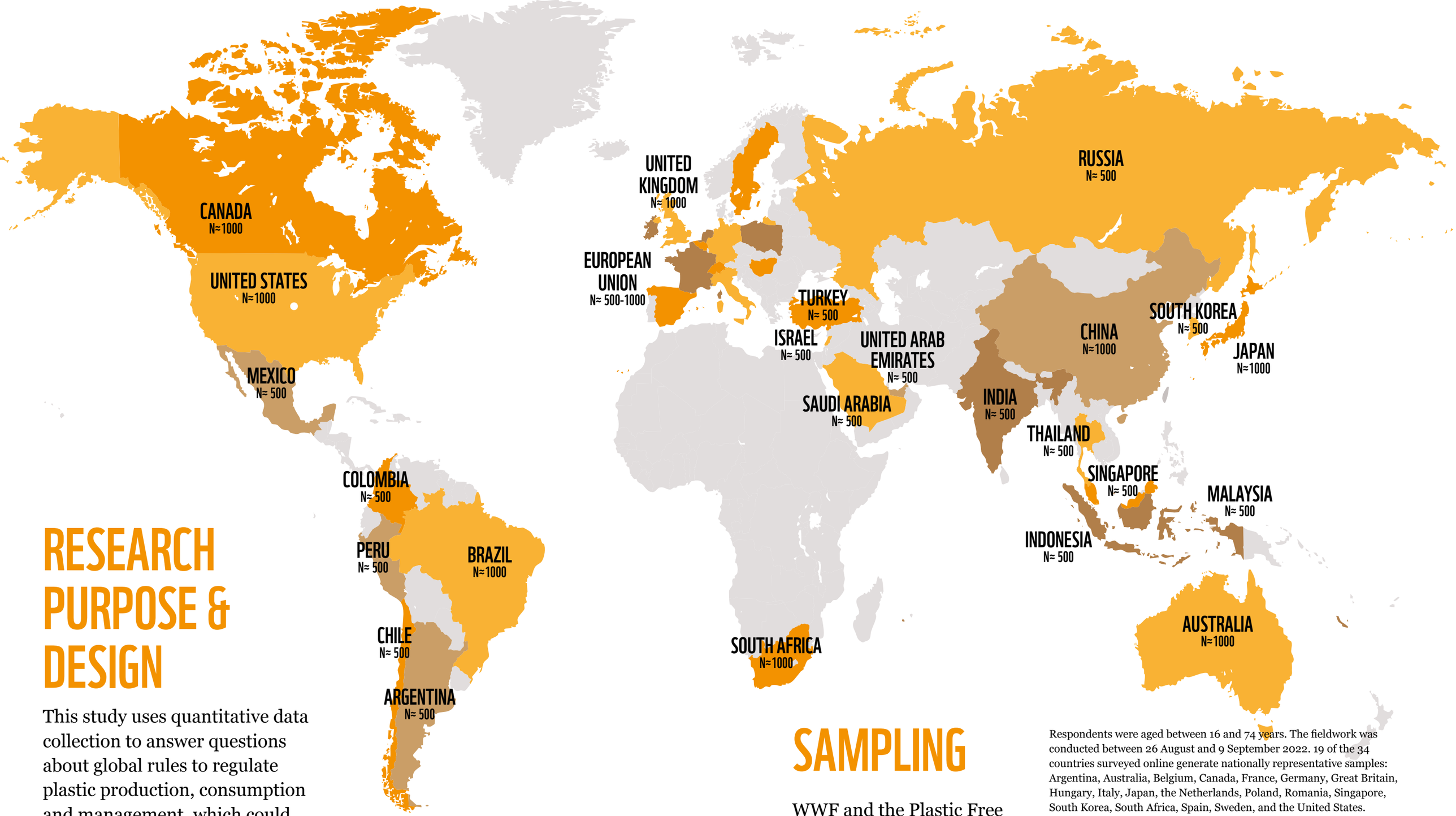


This adult grey seal from a colony in Horsey, Norfolk (UK) has a black plastic band around its neck, which has cut through the seal's blubber to the flesh (UK) © Sam Hobson / WWF-UK

INTRODUCTION

Plastic production, consumption and pollution levels have increased exponentially since plastic became widespread in the 1950s. More than 2,000 animal species have encountered plastic pollution in their environment, and nearly 90% of species specifically studied are known to be negatively affected.[1] The total social, economic and environmental costs of all plastic produced in 2019 have been estimated at US$3.7 trillion (+/-US$1 trillion) over its lifetime.[2]

By 2040, under a business-as-usual scenario, plastic waste generation is expected to double, plastic leakage into the ocean will triple, and levels of plastic pollution in the ocean will quadruple.[3] Recognizing the scale and urgency of the plastic pollution crisis, and the transboundary nature of the problem, UN member states agreed in March 2022 to start work on a treaty to end plastic pollution. The aim is to agree on a treaty text by the end of 2024.



RESEARCH PURPOSE & DESIGN

This study uses quantitative data collection to answer questions about global rules to regulate plastic production, consumption and management, which could be included in a UN treaty (see Appendix 1 for the full list of questions).

Quantitative data provides robust results that can be used to understand global levels of support for action on plastic pollution globally, across several regions and in countries where the sample is nationally representative.

SAMPLING

WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation commissioned global research company Ipsos to undertake this survey. It was conducted online, with 23,029 respondents in 34 countries.

Respondents were aged between 16 and 74 years. The fieldwork was conducted between 26 August and 9 September 2022. 19 of the 34 countries surveyed online generate nationally representative samples: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

The remaining countries produce a national sample that is more urban and educated and with higher incomes than their fellow citizens. The results reflect views among respondents, and the sample from those countries is not nationally representative.

More detail on the survey methodology is appended to this briefing and can be found on the Ipsos website.

https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-advisor-plastic-pollution-2022

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

88%
OF PEOPLE GLOBALLY THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT OR ESSENTIAL

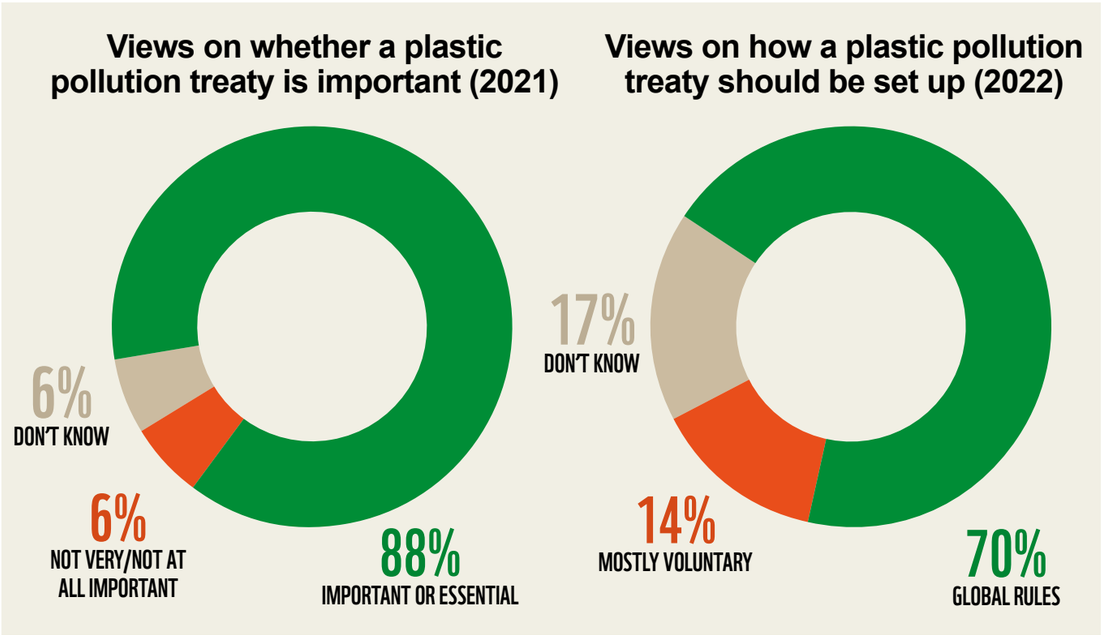
In March 2022, the governments of 175 countries agreed to start work on a global treaty on plastic pollution, covering the full plastic lifecycle, from extraction of oil and gas and plastic production, through to design, use, and management of plastic waste.

Leading up to this decision at the UN Environment Assembly, Ipsos surveyed people in 28 countries in September 2021 to understand whether they thought global action on plastic pollution was needed. Across all countries, 88% of people said a legally binding treaty to address plastic pollution is important, including one-third (34%) of people who said a treaty is essential.

One year on from this research, we wanted to explore people's views on **possible approaches to a treaty and whether it should include global rules** to curb plastic consumption and pollution. To do this, we asked people from 34 countries questions about how a treaty could be set up and specific global rules that could be included in a treaty.

Taken together, our research in 2021 and 2022 provide **a clear and compelling public mandate for global rules within an ambitious and comprehensive plastics treaty:**

- Nearly 9 in 10 people globally think a plastic pollution treaty is important or essential.
- 7 out of 10 people worldwide think the treaty should create global rules, and half of all people surveyed say there should be consequences for breaking those rules.
- Support for specific rules is even higher, with nearly 8 in 10 people supporting rules for extended producer responsibility, bans on difficult-to-recycle plastics, and labelling requirements.



WHAT WE FOUND

In 2022 we found strong support for global rules overall, finding **around three-quarters of respondents (on average) think they are important or very important** to:

- Ban unnecessary single-use plastics: 75%
- Ban types of plastic that cannot be easily recycled: 77%
- Make manufacturers and retailers responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling their packaging: 78%
- Require all new plastic products to contain recycled plastic: 76%
- Require labelling of plastic products, so it is clear how to sort them for reuse, recycling or disposal: 77%

Support was particularly high across Latin America (81-85%) compared with global averages (75-78%). This is consistent with survey results from 2021, where five of the top 10 most supportive countries of a plastics treaty were Latin American.

Even in countries with relatively lower levels of support for global rules, around 6 in 10 people surveyed support global rules to regulate plastic production, consumption and management.

When asked about options for how a treaty could be set up, 7 in 10 people say they support global rules rather than a voluntary approach. When asked about specific rules, support is substantially higher – with global averages of up to 78%. People have stronger opinions on tangible actions compared with the more conceptual question of how a treaty should be set up. This interpretation is supported by a comparatively high level of people responding 'don't know' to the question of how a treaty should be set up (a global average of 17%), compared with much lower levels of 'don't know' in response to specific rules (4-5%).

Overall, there is widespread and consistent support for global rules in all countries surveyed.

In 13 countries, support for particular rules was consistently higher than global averages, across all of the rules we asked about. These were Argentina, Australia, Chile, China, Great Britain, Colombia, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Peru, Romania, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey. These countries are from all regions of the world, with no clear trends in terms of wealthy/less developed countries. Several are plastic producing countries or consume particularly high levels of single-use plastics.[4] Plastic pollution is widespread and highly visible in most (if not all) of these countries, which may be driving high levels of public concern and support for government action.

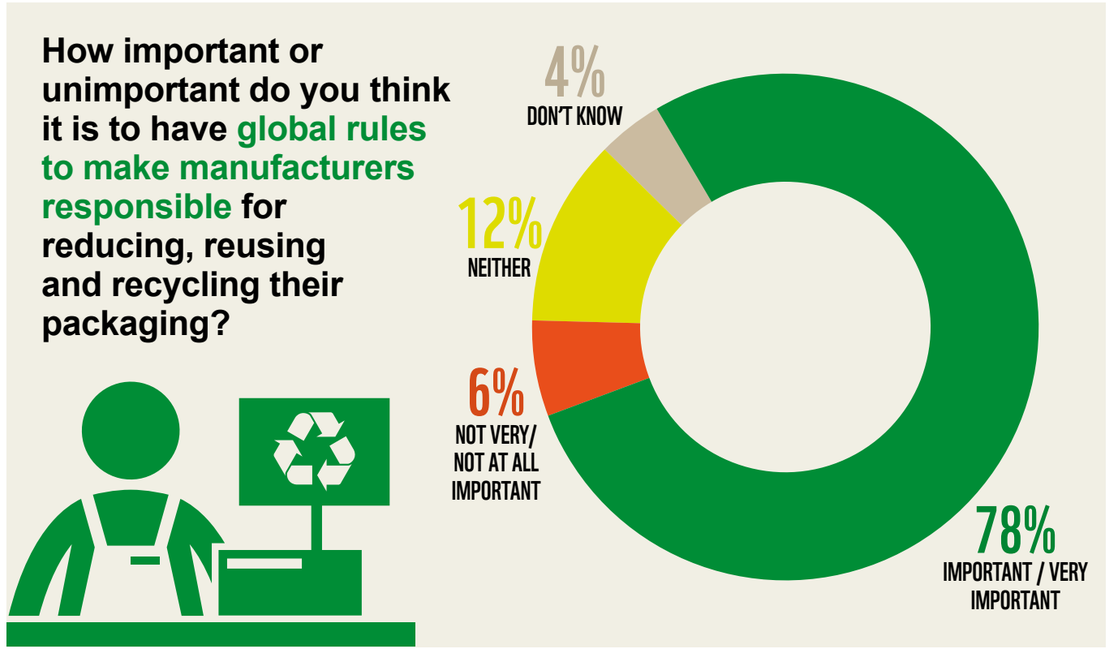
These results can be usefully contrasted with previous global research on plastic consumption, though the data is not directly comparable. Ipsos asked people in 28 countries about their views on extended producer responsibility (making producers more responsible for the plastic they produce), and single-use plastic bans[5] in 2019 and 2021.

In 2019, a global average of 71% said banning unnecessary single-use plastics is important, compared with 74% in 2022 supporting this as a global rule. In 2020, 80% said producers should be made responsible for the plastics they make, compared with 77% supporting this as a global rule in 2022.[6] Responses in 2021 were similar, though support for both measures was somewhat higher.

It is important to note that in earlier surveys, respondents likely answered these questions thinking about national/local regulation, not global rules (see page 6 for further analysis).

This data provides valuable insights for governments as they enter into negotiations on a plastic pollution treaty, which commence in Punta del Este (Uruguay) in November 2022. WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation urge governments to develop their national positions based on strong and widespread support among their constituents for global rules across a range of areas.

77%
OF PEOPLE THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO BAN TYPES OF PLASTIC THAT CAN'T BE EASILY RECYCLED



WHY GLOBAL RULES?

International laws, including treaties, can take very different approaches regarding how they are set up and what solutions are developed to address the problems they aim to solve. These decisions are taken through a process of negotiation between governments over several years. How treaties are set up and what commitments and rules they establish are critically important to how effective global agreements are in addressing global problems.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer are examples of treaties that created specific global rules to control harmful substances. Both have been very effective in reducing environmental and health risks.

Plastic production, trade, and waste management are part of a global system, and plastic pollution moves readily between countries and from land into waterways. High levels of plastic production and consumption and increasing waste volumes entail health risks for humans and existential threats to many marine and terrestrial species. For these reasons and more, WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation advocate for specific and consistent global rules in a plastics treaty to ensure that the treaty drives real change towards a circular economy, to keep plastic in the economy and out of nature.

Many businesses consider a global approach to circular economy transition and ending plastic pollution – which could include global rules – is necessary. This is evidenced by substantial membership of the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty[7], with over 80 members, including major multinationals, plastic producers and brand owners.

This research is the first to explicitly ask people from around the world about what a global approach to addressing plastic production, consumption and pollution might look like, and what specific rules people think are important or unimportant. Previous research has explored public opinion on plastic use and pollution. While levels of public support for particular measures are fairly consistent, it is likely that respondents to earlier surveys have answered these questions thinking about laws within their country rather than international laws. Many countries have or are introducing laws on single-use plastic products, recycled content and reuse requirements, which means domestic laws are likely to be top of mind for survey respondents.

One alternative to creating global rules, which would apply to all countries that agree to the treaty, is to create a mostly voluntary global agreement. This research shows very little support for voluntary arrangements, with only 14% of people thinking this is preferable, compared with 7 in 10 supporting specific global rules.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

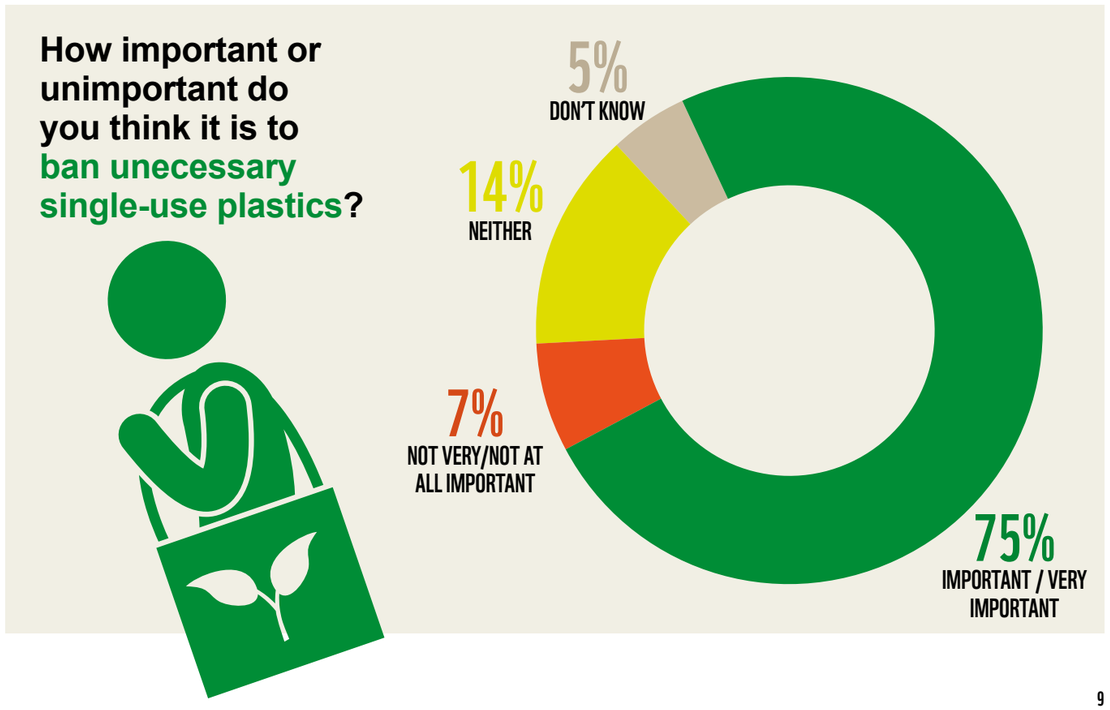
Over the next two years, governments will face important decisions on what they want to include in a global plastics treaty to end plastic pollution. These negotiations will be challenging and complex. While there is currently a high level of interest in delivering a robust and comprehensive plastics treaty from governments, the public and many businesses, the negotiating process is likely to expose fault lines and differences in what stakeholders want from a global plastics treaty.

Governments should ensure that the **urgency of the plastic pollution crisis we face is at the forefront of all of the choices they make**. WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation urge governments to focus on two key 'stakeholders' who will not be physically present in negotiations but whose needs and expectations are of vital importance, and whose future depends on it.

The first is our natural environments, ecosystems and species most vulnerable to plastic pollution, and already suffering a great deal from its impact. **Over the course of these negotiations, plastic pollution is anticipated to increase by 15%.**[8] Species such as marine turtles, which are particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution, will suffer further harm, injury, illness and death. Fossil fuel extraction and plastic production-related greenhouse gas emissions will cause further damage. These harms will be widespread and include risks to human health.

This leads to the second critical stakeholder – citizens of the world – whose views this research sought to understand. Our research shows unequivocal support from people around the world for robust global regulation of plastics from production through to end-of-life management. Only 14% of people support voluntary arrangements, and half support a treaty with clear rules and consequences for breaking them, or in other words, a 'treaty with teeth'.

Governments should keep this public mandate at the forefront of their decision-making and, by 2025, collectively deliver an effective solution to end plastic pollution for people and the planet.



APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This study collected quantitative data from people in 34 countries to understand their views on how a global plastics treaty should be set up, and specific global rules that could be included in the treaty. All respondents were asked the following questions:

The United Nations agreed earlier this year to develop a global treaty to end plastic pollution. Which of the following statements best represents your views on the way the treaty should be set up?

a) The treaty should create global rules for governments to end plastic pollution, with consequences for breaking those rules.
b) The treaty should create global rules for governments to end plastic pollution, without consequences for breaking the rules.
c) The treaty should be mostly voluntary, allowing governments to choose whether or not they want to take action on plastic pollution.
d) Don't know.

The treaty will include global rules for participating countries. How important or unimportant do you believe it is to have global rules to:

1. Ban unnecessary single-use plastics.
2. Ban types of plastic that cannot be easily recycled
3. Make manufacturers and retailers responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling plastic packaging.
4. Require all new plastic products to contain recycled plastic.
5. Require labelling of plastic products so it's clear how to responsibly sort for reuse, recycling or disposal.

Respondents were asked to select from the following: Very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, not very important, prefer not to say. These options were provided in rotating reverse order (i.e. sometimes respondents were asked first if they thought rules were very important, sometimes they were asked first if they thought rules were not at all important).

This round of the Global Advisor survey was conducted in 34 countries between August and September 2022 via the Ipsos Online Panel system among 23,029 people aged between 16 and 74 years. The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals in each of Australia, Brazil, Canada, mainland China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain, South Africa, and the USA, and approximately 500 individuals in each of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the USA can be taken as representative of these countries' general adult population under the age of 75. Samples in all other countries are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent compared with the general population. These results are not nationally representative, but reflect the views of the more 'connected' segment of these populations. Weighting has been applied to all samples to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent census data.

The 'Global Country Average' reflects the average result for all 34 countries in which the survey was conducted. This average has not been adjusted to the population size of each country and is not intended to suggest a total result. The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on Ipsos' use of credibility intervals, please visit their website.

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORT FOR GLOBAL RULES ACROSS ALL COUNTRIES

This table shows opinions from people in all countries surveyed about specific global rules that could be included in a plastic pollution treaty. It shows the combined total of people who think these rules are important and very important. The percentage of people who think they are not important or not at all important (combined) ranged from 3-17% across all questions. 4-29% of people said they were neither important nor unimportant (i.e. were ambivalent), and 1-9% of people responded 'don't know'. The full data can be found at www.ipsos.com

How important or unimportant do you believe it is to have global rules to:	Ban unnecessary single-use plastics (%)	Ban types of plastic that cannot be easily recycled (%)	Make manufacturers and retailers responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling plastic packaging (%)	Require all new plastic products to contain recycled plastic (%)	Require labelling of plastic products so it's clear how to responsibly sort for reuse, recycling or disposal (%)
Global country average	**75**	**77**	**78**	**76**	**77**
Argentina	81	85	83	83	83
Australia	79	78	81	78	80
Belgium	73	74	76	78	74
Brazil	70	76	76	76	76
Canada	69	72	74	72	74
Chile	82	84	83	84	84
China	81	82	85	79	84
Colombia	85	88	85	83	88
France	77	77	76	74	74
Germany	76	75	74	72	71
Great Britain	79	78	81	78	81
Hungary	74	75	79	78	80
India	78	79	78	80	79
Indonesia	80	83	85	81	84
Ireland	76	78	79	76	77
Israel	60	69	76	69	75
Italy	75	77	76	75	78
Japan	54	53	56	52	63
Malaysia	65	70	72	71	71
Mexico	87	85	86	87	88
Netherlands	68	70	76	73	68
Peru	82	87	85	85	84
Poland	76	75	69	73	75
Romania	78	79	82	80	82
Saudi Arabia	67	70	70	68	68
Singapore	69	74	77	76	79
South Africa	79	80	86	86	84
South Korea	82	83	76	80	80
Spain	78	79	78	77	77
Sweden	63	69	72	65	67
Thailand	79	75	80	78	81
Turkey	80	84	81	81	84
United Arab Emirates	72	74	76	72	74
United States	63	71	73	72	74

ENDNOTES

1 WWF & the Alfred Wegener Institute, 2022. Impacts of plastic pollution in the oceans on marine species, biodiversity and ecosystems.
2 Dalberg & WWF, 2021. Plastics: The costs to society, the environment and the economy.
3 Pew & SYSTEMIQ, 2020. Breaking the Plastic Wave: A comprehensive assessment of pathways towards stopping ocean plastic pollution.
4 Minderoo Foundation, 2021. Plastic Wastemakers' Index.
5 Ipsos, 2019. A Throwaway World: The challenge of plastic packaging and waste.
6 Ibid.
7 As of 31 October 2022, more than 80 businesses and business forums have joined the coalition and endorsed its vision statement, calling for 'an ambitious and effective treaty' to drive circular economy transition, with a 'broad scope, covering both macro- and microplastics and addressing all sources and pathways of plastic pollution into the natural environment'.
8 WWF, 2022. The UN treaty on plastic pollution: A decisive solution to end a global crisis.

Baby turtles hatch on Juani Island (Tanzania) and have to climb over rubbish strewn on the beach.

© Silke Stuckenbrock / WWF-Australia

THERE IS A COMPELLING PUBLIC MANDATE FOR STRONG GLOBAL RULES AS THE FOUNDATION OF A PLASTICS TREATY. THE ONUS IS NOW ON GOVERNMENTS TO DELIVER BY 2025.

WWF

Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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PLASTIC FREE JULY
By Plastic Free Foundation

Plastic Free July® is a key initiative of the Plastic Free Foundation that allows us co work towards our vision of seeing a world free of plastic waste.

www.plasticfreejulya.org