



**The fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5)**

**Open Letter from No More Butts (Civil Society Organisation) to Member States**

25<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

As we commence INC-5, I wanted to take the opportunity to provide an update on the status of cigarette filters in the negotiation process to date.

[Palau](#) and [Panama](#) have joined other countries specifically calling for a ban on cigarette filters.

Joining Peru, [Georgia, Rwanda, Switzerland and Thailand also show support for a ban of cigarette filters under problematic products in their CRP](#) (p9). This is in addition to the [Swiss Concept Paper on Plastic Products and Chemicals of Concern](#), which notes cigarette butts under single use and short-lived plastic products (p16).

At INC-3, [Singapore indicated their support for the proposed definition of Plastic product\(s\)](#), which includes cigarette butts (p3).

Further, (as noted in the slides from one of the stakeholder webinars), the EU + MS Conceptual approach would give the opportunity for cigarette filters to be included based on the possible criteria from UK and Thailand (p.8).

- ✓ The product rapidly breaks down into fragments or microplastics
- The product can create animal entanglement
- ✓ The product can be ingested by animal and organism
- ✓ The product has a high likelihood to be littered
- ✓ The product is inherently short-lived or single use
- ✓ The product is not reusable, recyclable in practice and at scale
- ✓ The product disrupts the ability of other items to be recycled
- The product negatively affects the quality or safety of the end-product of the recycling process

As it stands, in the [Compilation of draft text](#), there are two mentions of cigarette butts (p.21/p.74). In particular, we are seeking support to ensure that Annex X Option 1 (p.74) is maintained, which lists cigarette filters under the table of Plastic Products subject to Elimination. We would be seeking a date of 2030 for that elimination.

We also encourage Member States to consider the call by the [Belgian Superior Health Council](#) to ban filters as being supportive of this position, as well as the noted interest from [Netherlands and Denmark](#) for the same.

It may also be important to note that policy measures to prevent the environmental harms of tobacco products is now particularly relevant, with the adoption of [Article 18](#) by the Parties to the WHO FCTC at COP10 in February 2024. This is supported by the Statements made during interventions by the World Health Organization at [INC-3](#) and [INC-4](#).

In Australia, there have been significant progress in recent months that should give the delegation confidence to take action. NSW has announced in their Plastics: The Way Forward paper that they will collaborate across jurisdictions to take action on cigarette filters by 2027. The report also mentioned the Global Plastics Treaty.

Further, in late September 2024, a cigarette waste bill was approved by the South Australian Legislative Council.

Santa Cruz County has become the first jurisdiction to act, with approval received to ban the sales of filtered cigarettes by 2027.

I am available on the ground to provide further support and information to help delegates conclude a position on the ban of cigarette filters as part of the Treaty process.

Yours faithfully,

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## Background

Cigarette butts are the most littered item globally<sup>1</sup>. Estimates suggest that up to 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are discarded into the environment every year<sup>2</sup>. In Australia, it's estimated that 8.9 billion are littered annually<sup>3</sup>. They are easily carried in stormwater runoff through drainage systems and eventually to local streams, rivers, and waterways<sup>4</sup>.

A Local Environment Quality Survey of England 2017/18 showed that 52% of smokers who smoke every day thought putting a cigarette down the drain was acceptable and 39% of smokers admitted to throwing a cigarette butt down a drain within the past month<sup>5</sup>. Globally, it has been reported that 40% of discarded cigarette butts make it into our oceans and waterways<sup>6</sup>.

With a plastic filter made from cellulose acetate<sup>7</sup>, cigarette butts are photodegradable<sup>8</sup>, not biodegradable. Tobacco producer, Philip Morris International, notes that it can take up to 15 years for a cigarette butt to break down<sup>9</sup>. During this process, thousands of plastic microfibrils are created<sup>10</sup>.

Additionally, a World Health Organization paper highlights research that has shown that harmful chemicals leached from discarded butts, which include nicotine, arsenic and heavy metals, can be acutely toxic to aquatic organisms<sup>11</sup>. With over 7,000 chemicals<sup>12</sup> and research showing that each butt can contaminate up to 40 liters of water<sup>13</sup>, a San Diego State University suggested that the chemicals leached from one smoked cigarette butt were capable of killing half of the fish present in a one-liter bucket of water<sup>14</sup>.

Using the littering rates and the average weight of a cigarette butt<sup>15</sup>, it can be estimated that at least 580 tonnes of plastic tobacco filters end up in Australian waterways each year. With 15 years of litter accumulating, up to 8,800 tonnes of plastic cigarette filters would currently be in our waterways. According to Macedo et al., 2011 and Santos et al., 2005, cigarette butts could accidentally be ingested by some marine species (such as fish, birds, and whales) during feeding. There is also research to suggest they enter our food stream<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://environmentjournal.online/articles/an-estimated-4-5-trillion-cigarettes-are-thrown-away-each-year/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://irp.cdn-website.com/ed061800/files/uploaded/WWF-Australia-Ending-cigarette-butt-pollution-3Dec21.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/litter/targeted-programs/reducing-cigarette-butt-litter>

<sup>5</sup> <https://au.whales.org/2019/05/31/how-cigarette-butts-pollute-the-ocean-and-harm-whales-and-dolphins/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://kwit.app/en/blog/posts/cigarette-butts-the-main-source-of-sea-and-ocean-pollution/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/18/cigarette-butts-how-the-no-1-most-littered-objects-are-choking-our-coasts>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2697937/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.worldnoashtray.com/en/be-aware/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969721034550>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/behaviours-risk-factors/smoking/overview>

<sup>13</sup> <https://au.whales.org/2019/05/31/how-cigarette-butts-pollute-the-ocean-and-harm-whales-and-dolphins/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu\\_newscenter/news\\_story.aspx?sid=71209](https://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news_story.aspx?sid=71209)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.worldnoashtray.com/en/cigarette-butt-littering-information.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/07/160707083024.htm>