



Staff Recommendation

February 23, 2022

Action Item: Statewide Microplastics Strategy

Kaitlyn Kalua, Water Quality Program Manager

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 et seq. of the Public Resources Code:

“The California Ocean Protection Council hereby adopts the *Statewide Microplastics Strategy* (Exhibit A) and directs staff to work with agency and other partners to implement this plan over the next four years.”

LOCATION: Statewide

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: This action would implement strategic targets in Goal 3, within Objective 3.4: Improve Coastal and Ocean Water Quality.

EXHIBITS:

Exhibit A: *Statewide Microplastics Strategy*

Exhibit B: Public Comments Received

FINDINGS AND RESOLUTION:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 et seq. of the Public Resources Code:

“The California Ocean Protection Council hereby adopts the *Statewide Microplastics Strategy* (Exhibit A) and directs staff to work with agency and other partners to implement this plan over the next four years.”

BACKGROUND & PROJECT SUMMARY:

In 2018, California adopted Senate Bill 1263 (Portantino), adding Chapter 3.2 and section 35635 to Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, requiring the Ocean Protection Council (OPC), in collaboration with specified state agencies, to adopt and implement a

Statewide Microplastics Strategy. The legislation requires that the Strategy include, but not be limited to: 1) a description of the sources, pathways, and impacts of microplastics on coastal and marine ecosystems; 2) a risk assessment framework based on the best available science on exposure of microplastics to organisms; 3) standardized methods for sampling, detecting, characterizing, and monitoring microplastics; 4) a prioritized research plan and; 5) policy recommendations and management actions. This legislation further requires the OPC to submit the Statewide Microplastics Strategy to the Legislature on or before December 31, 2021, and to report to the Legislature on implementation and findings of the Statewide Microplastics Strategy, and on recommendations for policy changes or additional research by December 31, 2025.

The final Statewide Microplastics Strategy (Exhibit A) was informed by scientific advancements made over the past three years, existing state agency planning documents and commitments, numerous discussions with state agency staff and Plastic Pollution Steering Committee representatives (an interagency group made up of representatives from the California Department of Public Health: Tobacco Control Program, California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle), California Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Toxic Substances Control: Safer Consumer Products Program, California Fish and Game Commission, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, State Lands Commission, and State Water Resources Control Board), and extensive public comments following the release of the draft Statewide Microplastics Strategy in December 2021.

The Statewide Microplastics Strategy builds from the findings of the OPC Science Advisory Team (OPC SAT) interdisciplinary microplastics working group, convened by the Ocean Science Trust and funded by OPC, which released the report entitled [Assessing the Risk of Microplastic Pollution in California](#) in Spring 2021. The OPC SAT specifically recommended precautionary management of microplastic pollution and emphasized upstream source reduction as the most effective response, which guided the pollution prevention approach outlined in the final Statewide Microplastics Strategy.

The Strategy outlines a two-track approach to comprehensively manage microplastics in California. The first track emphasizes pollution prevention and pathway interventions with recommendations for immediate, multi-benefit ‘no regrets’ actions to reduce microplastics pollution. The second track outlines a comprehensive research strategy to enhance understanding of microplastic sources, pathways, risk, and to inform future management solutions specific to California.

Track One: Solutions. Multi-benefit solutions the state can immediately act upon while the scientific knowledge of microplastics develops further.

- **Pollution Prevention** to eliminate plastic waste at the source (products or materials from which microplastics originate) and prevent the introduction of microplastics into the environment.

- **Pathway Interventions** to intervene within specific pathways (e.g., stormwater and wastewater) that mobilize microplastics from a specific source into California waters and improve overall ecosystem health.
- **Education** to inform public behaviors, attitudes, and priorities around plastics use and waste reduction.

Track Two: Science to Inform Future Action. Research priorities to advance scientific knowledge of microplastics to develop and refine future solutions.

- **Monitoring** to understand and identify trends of microplastic pollution statewide.
- **Risk** to improve understanding of critical thresholds at which aquatic life and humans are adversely impacted by microplastic exposure.
- **Sources & Pathways Prioritization** to identify and prioritize future management solutions based on predominant ways microplastics enter California waters.
- **Evaluating New Solutions** to develop and implement potential future solutions.

The Statewide Microplastics Strategy was released for public comment beginning on December 21, 2021 with the comment period ending January 21, 2022. OPC received over 120 written comments from nearly 160 individuals, organizations, agencies, businesses, and other entities. The final Statewide Microplastics Strategy was revised based on the public comment received to clarify the timeline of specific recommendations, to provide additional guidance for implementation of specific recommendations (such as the sector-specific workshops outlined in the Strategy to advance solutions to reduce plastic pollution), and to elevate equity and public transparency during the implementation of the final Strategy.

Specific recommendations to address microplastic pollution include reducing the fragmentation of larger plastics into microplastics include the elimination of specific products that are among the highest contributors of both plastic and microplastic pollution, collaborating with sector-specific industries to advance technological innovation, alternative material sources and product designs, and advancing improved stormwater management. The Strategy outlines research priorities that include the establishment of standardized methods, development of statewide microplastic monitoring program, creation of a source emission inventory, and advancement of existing risk thresholds that can inform future regulatory and management actions by 2025.

Overall, the final Statewide Microplastics Strategy reflects collective actions by relevant partners in the state, leverages existing scientific networks, and promotes early actions to abate microplastics pollution as scientific understanding of microplastics impacts to California are simultaneously advanced. The actions and recommendations outlined in the final Statewide Microplastics Strategy additionally reflect the priorities of the [California Ocean Litter Prevention Strategy](#) and the [Top 10 Recommendations to Address Plastic Pollution in California's Coastal and Marine Ecosystems](#), recognizing that management of larger plastics and litter is necessary to prevent ongoing fragmentation of these plastics into microplastics.

The 22 recommended early actions and 13 research priorities of the Statewide Microplastics Strategy are designed to be iterative, allowing the state and external partners to refine future actions to reduce and abate microplastics pollution. This final Statewide Microplastics Strategy will inform state agency partner actions and OPC investments over the next four years, with OPC committed to using the findings from these actions and investments to inform additional recommendations to the Legislature in 2025.

The recommendations outlined in the Statewide Microplastics Strategy are advisory and do not supersede, nullify, or otherwise alter existing law and formal rulemaking processes.