

Case Study: FCDO's catalytic impact driving action on plastic pollution in Papua New Guinea

How UK International Development funding for a National Action Plan to end plastic pollution in Papua New Guinea unlocked new investment to combat an urgent health and environmental crisis.

Image credit: HomoCosmos

Summary

This case study demonstrates how recent funding is acting as a catalytic investment in Papua New Guinea, creating the evidence base, stakeholder alignment and policy roadmap needed to unlock further financing and accelerate implementation.

In 2025, with funding from the UK Government through UK International Development, Common Seas partnered with PNG's Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) to co-develop the country's first National Action Plan (NAP) to reduce plastic pollution.

The process generated PNG's first comprehensive evidence base on plastic pollution, mapping the root causes and impacts of the country's 200,000-tonne plastic problem, and produced a government owned 10-year roadmap capable of reducing plastic pollution by 61% by 2035.

The investment did more than deliver a strategy. By providing credible evidence, clear priorities and broad stakeholder support, it created the conditions for follow-on investment and implementation.

Building on the NAP's findings, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional

Environment Programme (SPREP), through the Australian Government - funded Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), commissioned Common Seas to provide technical support for implementation of one of the key priorities: strengthening regulation of single-use plastics.

As a result, PNG is now progressing legislative reforms informed by the NAP - demonstrating how early investment can accelerate policy implementation while attracting additional support, reducing duplication of effort, unlocking long-term impact and improving value for funders.

The challenge: Plastic pollution and climate vulnerability

Papua New Guinea faces a severe plastic pollution crisis that directly impacts its coastal ecosystems, public health, and key blue economy sectors such as fisheries and tourism.

Evidence generated through the NAP established the following:

- PNG generates approximately 214,700 tonnes of macro-plastic waste annually, of which an estimated 118,200 tonnes leaks directly into the environment
- Without intervention, plastic pollution is projected to increase by 43% by 2035

The impacts extend beyond pollution alone. In PNG, plastic items clog urban drainage systems, exacerbating flood risk. The open burning of waste releases harmful pollutants that affect community health, and marine debris degrades the very coral reefs and mangroves that protect coastlines from climate-related threats such as rising sea levels and tropical storms. Across its lifecycle, plastic accounts for roughly 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions globally - more than the aviation and shipping sectors combined.

Among the most significant challenges identified through the NAP was the prevalence of single-use plastics, which account for more than 68% of plastic waste leaking into PNG's marine environment. Tackling these products emerged as one of the country's most important opportunities for reducing pollution and strengthening environmental resilience.



The opportunity: Building a National Action Plan for plastic pollution reduction



Working in partnership with CEPA, Common Seas co-developed PNG's National Action Plan to reduce Plastic Pollution: a comprehensive 10-year roadmap for reducing plastic pollution.

The NAP provided more than a strategy document. It brought together government agencies, businesses and other stakeholders around a shared understanding of the problem and a common set of priorities. Through evidence generation, stakeholder engagement and policy analysis, the NAP established both the justification and the pathway for future action.



The analysis showed that reducing the use of problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics represented one of the most effective opportunities for achieving the NAP's potential of reducing plastic pollution by 61% by 2035. As a result, strengthening regulation of these items was identified as a priority intervention.

By creating a robust evidence base and a government-endorsed implementation framework, the UK International Development investment established the foundations needed for future partners to build on, rather than repeat, earlier work.

What changed: From investment to follow-on action

The NAP not only laid out a roadmap for long-term policy change, but – significantly – created momentum and attracted further investment.

Following publication of the NAP, SPREP, through the Australian Government-funded POLP, were able to invest in the next phase of work. Building on the baseline modelling, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement already completed through the NAP process, SPREP was able to move directly to the next stage of implementation in PNG rather than commissioning further diagnostic studies.

Equally important, where government agencies face multiple competing priorities and limited resources – the NAP provided a coherent foundation with both the data and the strategic justification for prioritising specific interventions on single-use plastic as a key pollution reduction initiative capable of delivering significant and measurable impact.

As a result, SPREP commissioned Common Seas to provide targeted technical analysis to assess PNG's existing plastic bag ban and explore options for expanding the legislative framework to address additional single-use plastics.

"Addressing the crisis of plastic pollution is very important for Papua New Guinea, given our unique biodiversity and the reliance of our communities on a pristine national environment."

Brendan Trawen, Acting Director at
Conservation and Environment
Protection Authority (CEPA)



Why it matters: Advancing legislative reform

In June 2026, Common Seas presented the completed cost benefit analysis to SPREP, CEPA, and PNG's Technical Working Committee to inform legislative review.

The analysis recommended expanding the existing plastic bag ban to cover all single-use plastic bags, including biodegradable alternatives. These items require industrial composting facilities that are not currently available in PNG and still contribute to microplastics pollution when mismanaged.

The analysis found that a comprehensive ban would be the strongest economic and environmental outcome, delivering wider benefits through reducing pollution while remaining operationally viable.

These recommendations have already helped inform government decision-making. Following presentation of the findings, the Technical Working Committee agreed with the proposed approach and are proceeding with legal drafting to expand the ban for plastic bags, and work is underway to further expand to cover additional items.

This marks an important transition into implementation. What began as evidence for a roadmap has progressed into tangible policy reform, leading to measurable reduction in plastic pollution at source and a strengthening of the country's long term resilience.



In conclusion: Catalytic investment creates long-term impact

- **UK International Development funding created the foundation for further investment.** By supporting PNG's first national plastic pollution action plan, the programme enabled the development of the evidence base, stakeholder alignment, and policy roadmap needed to attract additional financing and deliver action.
- **Early investment reduced costs and accelerated implementation.** With foundational research, stakeholder alignment and policy analysis already complete, subsequent partners could direct funding towards targeted legislative reform and implementation rather than duplicating earlier analysis.
- **The approach strengthened government decision-making** – providing both the evidence and strategic justification to prioritise specific legislative reform and guide future action.
- **The model is replicable across Small Island Developing States.** The PNG experience demonstrates how catalytic funding can help countries translate environmental challenges into actionable and evidence-based policy pathways that unlock further implementation investment from regional and international partners.

