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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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**IMPROVING CABIN WASTE REUSE AND RECYCLING PERFORMANCE**

**(Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA))**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This information paper calls attention to the increasing challenge of reducing, reusing and recycling of cabin wastes and contributing to the 12th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 12) on sustainable consumption and production. This information paper highlights the need for a collaborative approach in tackling this challenge and calls for the introduction of harmonized, smarter regulation.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This information paper relates to the Strategic Objective Environmental Protection.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Not applicable
<i>References:</i>	

<sup>1</sup> English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by IATA.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aviation sector faces challenges associated with improved cabin waste performance and the replacement of single-use plastics (SUP) products with sustainable alternatives.

1.2 The lack of cabin waste reuse and recycling is a highly visible indicator of environmental performance; with recent International Air Transport Association (IATA) surveys indicating that passengers view cabin waste as being of equal importance as the sector's greenhouse gas emissions challenge.

1.3 Although airlines face technical and operational obstacles, the lack of harmonized and risk-based animal health regulations precludes reuse and recycling and a move towards the replacement of SUP products with sustainable alternatives. This restricts the sector's ability to make a positive contribution to the circular economy and meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 12.3 to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030.

1.4 IATA's research indicates that international catering waste (ICW) represents a negligible risk of spreading animal diseases and recommends a refocussing of enforcement activities which would then facilitate the widespread adoption of reuse and recycling programs.

1.5 The inappropriate disposal of SUP products and its impact on the marine environment is a key challenge for our society. Although SUP is widely used in aviation due to its strength, lightness and hygienic properties, voluntary action by airlines has demonstrated that the sector is keen to replace these products with more sustainable alternatives.

1.6 However, asymmetric SUP restrictions adopted at national and airport level is hampering replacement efforts and ICW regulations force the landfilling or incineration of bio based alternatives.

1.7 Inappropriate and asymmetric regulations are the main challenge for aviation to improve cabin waste management performance, contribute to the circular economy and replace SUP with sustainable alternatives. Airlines, airports and their service providers need to coordinate actions to promote regulatory change; provide demand signals to the emerging sustainable alternatives market; encourage the development of appropriate recycling, reuse & recovery systems and infrastructure; and, to share information with passengers and stakeholders.

## 2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The airline industry has been subject to criticism for poor cabin waste management practices, and, with continued global passenger growth, airline cabin waste volumes and management costs are set to increase significantly.

2.2 Based on limited waste composition analysis (WCA), IATA estimates that the sector generated 6.4 million tonnes of cabin waste in 2019 and, although these volumes decreased during the pandemic, it is expected that similar volumes will be generated by 2024.

2.3 Airlines and their catering service providers can realize significant cost savings through enhanced food and beverage (F&B) optimisation efforts. WCA data indicates that over 20% of cabin waste is untouched F&B representing at a cost to the sector of \$2.4 to 3.6 billion per year.

2.4 All cabin waste is subject to national waste management controls that limit pollution, but many countries have gone further with their regulations, introducing restrictions on catering waste from international flights to protect their agricultural sector with respect to animal health.

2.5 Strict controls on catering waste from international flights based on animal health concerns often preclude the reuse and recycling of any materials due to the perceived risk of transferring animal disease by contaminated ingredients served in airline meals and beverages. Although, the in-flight catering sector operates under strict hygiene and ingredient source controls it currently focuses on human and not animal health concerns.

2.6 International airlines are facing challenges with differing SUP regulations being implemented at airport, regional and national levels. Asymmetric SUP regulations result in differing alternative products being introduced on separate legs of a journey, confusing passengers and crew, increasing compliance costs and generating more waste.

2.7 These emerging regulations do not recognize that alternatives to SUP must meet strict aviation security and hygiene constraints and that replacement should be based on a lifecycle approach that takes emissions from flight operations into account.

2.8 At least 27 IATA airlines have taken a proactive approach to the challenge of SUP by removing straws and drinks stirrers and introducing bio-based cutlery, crockery and packaging solutions. However, many of these initiatives have stalled or been reversed both as a result of the pandemic and the introduction of asymmetric regulations.

2.9 In March 2022, the UN Environment Assembly endorsed a resolution to end plastic pollution and to establish an international legally binding agreement to underpin this commitment by 2024.

2.10 IATA's activities related to cabin waste and SUP are led by the Sustainability and Environment Advisory Council (SEAC), and include the following:

2.10.1 SEAC formed a Sustainable Cabin Working Group that aims to identify and review cabin waste and SUP issues, emerging legislation and technology, and provides a platform for airlines to share best practices and advises on areas that require technical support, research or regulatory engagement. The Working Group has prepared guidance on the harmonization of SUP regulations for regulators.

2.10.2 IATA commissioned a study to understand the risks posed by airline catering waste on animal health. It advocates the adoption of smarter regulation which allows reuse and recycling while maintaining animal health controls.

2.10.3 IATA has published a cabin waste handbook that promotes a holistic approach to cabin waste management, with a focus on waste minimization, reuse and recycling. The handbook identifies 23 actions that could be initiated by airlines, manufacturers and service providers to improve waste performance. It aims to drive technology development and uptake and supporting service contracts that promote waste minimization and recycling, and ultimately leads to the adoption of long-term sustainable solutions.

2.10.4 IATA's guidance on cabin waste management during the pandemic was incorporated into the CAPSCA (Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation) recommendations for amendments to ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) guidance. The aim of IATA's guidance was to ensure that authorities adopt a risk-based approach

with only waste associated with passengers and crew that exhibit COVID-19 symptoms deemed biohazardous.

2.10.5 IATA has commenced engagement with UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in an effort to have aviation's concerns reflected in the Plastics Treaty; including the need for regulatory harmonization; the importance for SUP products for aviation security, safety and hygiene purposes; and emissions associated with heavier alternatives.

2.10.6 In early June 2022, IATA was one of 26 private sector representatives invited to participate in UNEP's ad hoc open-ended working group meeting dialogues to prepare for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) developing a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

2.10.7 The Director of the Economy Division (UNEP) presented a keynote speech on the proposed Plastic Treaty at the World Air Transport Summit (WATS) on 21 June 2022 in Doha, Qatar and called for increased collaboration across the sector to improve plastic recycling and replacement with sustainable alternatives.

2.11 IATA is coordinating its activities with other aviation associations including the Airline Catering Association (ACA), International Flight Services Association (IFSA) and the Aviation Sustainability Forum (ASF).

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The adoption of smarter international catering waste (ICW) and single-use plastics (SUP) regulation will result in reduced cabin waste, enhanced material recovery, financial benefits and improved customer satisfaction whilst supporting regulators in maintaining high animal health controls.

3.2 Coordinated action between governments and the airline sector is needed to ensure aviation makes a positive contribution to the circular economy.

3.3 The Assembly is invited to take note of this Information Paper.