

Global Plastic Ban Could Save \$8 Trillion

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Global Plastic Ban Could Save \$8 Trillion: WWF-Earth Action Report

Context:

The global plastic pollution crisis has reached alarming levels, severely affecting ecosystems, human health, and economies. In this backdrop, the **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)** commissioned a study by **Earth Action (EA)** to assess the **economic and environmental implications** of banning or phasing out high-risk plastic products. The findings suggest that such measures could save the global economy **\$4.7-\$8 trillion between 2025 and 2040**.

This study gains significance as the world prepares for the **Global Plastics Treaty negotiations**, aiming to forge legally binding solutions for plastic pollution.

About the Study:

- **Commissioned by:** World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
- **Conducted by:** Earth Action
- **Data Source:** Based on the **Plasteax dataset**, a global database of plastic product and waste data.
- **Objective:**
 - To assess the **costs, benefits, and timelines** of banning or phasing out **high-risk plastic products**.
 - To compare scenarios such as **immediate ban, phased ban, and staggered ban** against **business-as-usual (BAU)** models.

Key Findings of the Study:

1. Economic Savings Potential:

- An **immediate global ban** could lead to savings of up to **\$8 trillion** between **2025 and 2040**.
 - A **phased ban approach** could save around **\$7 trillion**.
 - A **staggered ban model** could yield savings of **\$4.7 trillion**.
 - In contrast, continuing with **business-as-usual plastic use** would result in an estimated cost of **\$10 trillion** globally.
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2. Targeted Plastic Products:

- The study identified certain plastic items as **high-risk** due to their environmental impact and lack of recyclability:
 - **Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)**
 - **Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)**
 - **Polystyrene Packaging**
 - **Single-use plastic items** such as:
 - **Straws**
 - **Cotton buds**
 - **Cutlery and plates**
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3. Environmental Gains:

- Estimated reduction of **173-224 million tonnes** in overall **plastic use** by 2040.
 - Reduction of **51-74 million tonnes** in **mismanaged plastic waste**, which often ends up in oceans or landfills.
 - Significant improvement in **marine and terrestrial ecosystems**, with positive impact on biodiversity and public health.
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4. Cost of Inaction vs Action:

- Under **business-as-usual**, global plastic use will create economic burdens up to **\$10 trillion**.
 - In contrast, the **ban scenario** would cost only **\$2 trillion**, leading to a net saving of **\$8 trillion**.
 - Waste management cost savings alone would reach **\$50 billion** due to reduced disposal and landfill burden.
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5. Private Sector Transition Costs:

- The estimated **transition cost** for industries is relatively low at **\$143 million**.
 - These costs would be offset by:
 - **Long-term savings**
 - **Reduced environmental liability**
 - **Emerging business opportunities** in sustainable alternatives and innovation in packaging.
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Relevance to UPSC:

- The study is important for topics under:
 - **Environment and Ecology**
 - **Sustainable Development**
 - **Climate Change and Waste Management**
 - **GS Paper III - Environmental Conservation, Waste Management, and Pollution Control**
- Aligns with **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**:
 - **SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production**
 - **SDG 13 - Climate Action**
 - **SDG 14 - Life Below Water**
- Supports India's efforts like:
 - **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 (amended in 2022)**
 - **Swachh Bharat Mission**
 - **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework**

