Cambridge Prisms: Plastics

www.cambridge.org/plc

Counting what counts: Three years of *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics*

Stephen Fletcher

Revolution Plastics Institute, University of Portsmouth, UK

Editorial

Cite this article: Fletcher S (2026). Counting what counts: Three years of *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics*. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics*, **4**, e18, 1–2

https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2026.10057

Received: 19 June 2026 UTC
Revised: 19 June 2026 UTC
Accepted: 03 July 2026 UTC

Corresponding author:
Stephen Fletcher;
Email: steve.fletcher@port.ac.uk

Abstract

Since publishing its first article in May 2023, *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* has established itself as a leading platform for interdisciplinary, policy-relevant scholarship addressing the global plastics crisis. The journal has published research spanning political economy, activism, waste management, chemical safety, life-cycle assessment and environmental justice, united by a commitment to societal relevance and actionable insights. Its contributions have informed policy debates, supported international negotiations, strengthened civil society advocacy and fostered collaborations across disciplines, sectors and regions. A notable achievement was the 2025 collection of open letters from more than 60 experts calling for ambitious measures within the global plastics treaty negotiations. The journal has now received its first Impact Factor (5.3) and CiteScore (4.2), placing it in the top quartile of Environmental Studies journals. While these metrics signal strong early visibility and scholarly engagement, they should be interpreted cautiously as partial and short-term indicators. More significant is the journal's growing influence in connecting research, policy and practice to drive meaningful change.

The first article in *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* was published on 8 May 2023. It explored how seabirds could serve as indicators of plastic pollution in the marine environment (Hamilton et al., 2023). Perhaps unknowingly, that article embodied the defining qualities of the journal. It was explicitly set within the context of the global plastics crisis, combined multiple strands of evidence to present a balanced, integrated perspective and went beyond simply reporting findings to directly engaging with their policy implications. In doing so, the article reflected a broader view of scientific scholarship, not only diagnosing issues but also informing the design, implementation and evaluation of responses within a complex and contested governance landscape (Washbourne et al., 2024). By the end of June 2023, the journal had already published a remarkably diverse body of work, covering subjects from the political economy of marine plastic pollution (Jacques, 2023), anti-plastic activism (Dauvergne and Islam, 2023), life cycle assessment in the food and beverage industry (Chitaka and Goga, 2023), sustainable waste management in the Global South (Karadimas et al., 2023), hazardous chemicals in recycled and reusable plastic food packaging (Geueke et al., 2023) and the lived experiences of informal waste pickers (Gutberlet, 2023). What unites this range of research is a commitment to critical insights and societal relevance, emphasised by a focus on actionable interdisciplinary research.

From the outset, *Plastics* has aimed to make a meaningful contribution to real-world efforts to reduce the harms caused by plastics. Research published in *Plastics* has influenced ongoing policy debates, informed national and international decision-making processes, supported the work of intergovernmental organisations, provided evidence for civil society campaigns and helped shape public discourse through media engagement. It has also fostered new collaborations across disciplines, sectors and regions, and strengthened the research and practice networks necessary to address global plastics challenges. Since its launch, the journal has continued to develop as a platform for engaged, policy-relevant scholarship.

Thematic collections within *Plastics* have provided a platform for the research community to discuss and shape important research agendas. One of its most significant contributions was a landmark collection of open letters published in July 2025, timed to align with the start of the second part of the fifth Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting for a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The collection, titled "Act boldly or fail: academic perspectives at a pivotal moment in global plastics treaty negotiations," comprised 22 letters written by more than 60 leading plastics experts worldwide. Together, the letters urged negotiators to agree on ambitious and enforceable measures to combat plastic pollution, such as reducing production, phasing out toxic additives and prioritising human health within the treaty (Fletcher, 2025).

It is within this context that the journal has achieved an important milestone by earning its first Impact Factor and CiteScore. For new journals, being included in major indexing services and receiving citation-based metrics are key achievements. They demonstrate that the journal has

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 17:59:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2026.10057

gained visibility in the academic community and that its articles are being recognised and cited in ongoing scholarly discussions. Plastics has secured a CiteScore of 4.2 and an Impact Factor of 5.3, placing the journal in Q1 for Environmental Studies. By most standards, this is an excellent achievement for a broadly focused journal at this early stage of its development. However, these metrics should be interpreted carefully and with nuance. Citation metrics offer a limited and short-term view of a journal's performance. They reflect collective scholarly attention over brief periods and are affected by disciplinary norms, publication cycles and the statistical effects of highly cited papers (Pudovkin, 2018; Aronson, 2025). For a new journal, such metrics can be unstable and should be viewed as early indicators rather than definitive measures of long-term influence, originality or impact (Aronson, 2025).

More fundamentally, *Plastics* was never conceived as a journal defined solely by its metrics. Its aim has always been to provide a space for interdisciplinary exchange, to connect evidence with policy and practice, and to support research that leads to meaningful change. Much of the journal's impact lies beyond what citation metrics can capture. This includes influencing policies and legal frameworks, the uptake of evidence by governments, civil society organisations, communities and industry, contributions to public debate, and its role in convening a global community of researchers and practitioners. These impacts are often diffuse, cumulative and embedded in decision-making processes, and therefore do not fit easily into traditional bibliometric frameworks (González et al., 2025). Receiving an Impact Factor and CiteScore should therefore be seen as an important and welcome recognition of the journal's growing presence within the academic landscape, but are perhaps better viewed as signs of progress on a much longer journey.

To further strengthen its impact, the journal is creating a new article series titled *"Future directions,"* designed to address a persistent gap in the field between evidence generation and actionable recommendations. Research on plastics has expanded rapidly, yet it often remains fragmented and difficult to translate into clear priorities for action. The new series will provide a space for concise, forward-looking contributions that go beyond merely describing problems to outline credible, evidence-based pathways forward. Each article will identify a specific challenge, synthesise current evidence and outline actionable priorities for research, policy, innovation or practice. In doing so, the series aims to reinforce the journal's role as a convenor of agenda-setting scholarship, further strengthening its relevance to policymakers, practitioners and interdisciplinary audiences. More broadly, it reflects a natural extension of the journal's mission to clarify the choices, trade-offs and opportunities that will influence how the global plastics crisis is addressed in the years ahead. As Editor-in-Chief, I invite you to join us on this exciting and challenging journey.

Open peer review. To view the open peer review materials for this article, please visit http://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2026.10057.

Author contribution. Stephen Fletcher is the sole author of this editorial.

Competing interests. Stephen Fletcher is Editor-in-Chief of *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics.*

Funding statement. Stephen Fletcher received no specific financial support for this editorial.

References

Aronson JK (2025) When I use a word … Academic publishing: The impact factor. *British Medical Journal* **388**, r333. http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.r333.

Chitaka TY and Goga T (2023) The evolution of life cycle assessment in the food and beverage industry: A review. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e2. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.4.

Dauvergne P and Islam S (2023) The politics of anti-plastics activism in Indonesia and Malaysia. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e1. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.3.

Fletcher S (2025) Act boldly or fail: Academic perspectives at a pivotal moment in global plastics treaty negotiations. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **3**, e28. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2025.10024.

Geueke B, **Phelps DW**, **Parkinson LV and Muncke J** (2023) Hazardous chemicals in recycled and reusable plastic food packaging. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e7. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.7.

González P, **Fors M and Torres A** (2025) Altmetrics in the evaluation of scholarly impact: A systematic and critical literature review. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* **10**, 1693304. https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2025.1693304.

Gutberlet J (2023) Global plastic pollution and informal waste pickers. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e9. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.10.

Hamilton BM, **Clark BL and Borrelle SB** (2023) Monitoring to conservation: The science–policy nexus of plastics and seabirds. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e3. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.2.

Jacques PJ (2023) Stages of capitalist development and maximum marine plastic pollution. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**(1), e5. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.1.

Karadimas D, **Garner E and Seay J** (2023) A sustainable approach to plastic waste management in the global south. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* **1**, e4. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2023.5.

Pudovkin AI (2018) Comments on the use of the journal impact factor for assessing the research contributions of individual authors. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* **3**, 2. https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2018.00002.

Washbourne CL, **Murali R**, **Saidi N**, **Peter S**, **Pisa PF**, **Sarzynski T**, **Ryu H**, **Filyushkina A**, **Campagne CS**, **Kadykalo AN**, **Ávila-Flores G and Amiar T** (2024) Navigating the science policy interface: A co-created mind-map to support early career research contributions to policy-relevant evidence. *Environmental Evidence* **13**(1), 15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13750-024-00334-5.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 17:59:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2026.10057