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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Event ID: HQ 124

“Source-to-sea collaboration: A game changer for the whole water cycle”

Thursday 23 March, 17:00-18:15, UN HQ, Side Event Room 8

Organized by:

Lead organiser: Greece | Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy

Co-organisers: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica, Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management (S2S Platform), Global Water Partnership (GWP), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO), Deltares, DHI, Global Environment Facility (GEF), Japan Water Forum (JWF), Nireas-IWRC/University of Cyprus, Ocean Sewage Alliance (OSA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Plymouth Marine Laboratory, Swedish Agency of Marine and Water Management (SwAM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Environment Programme – Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP-MAP), Water Science Policy (WSP), Wetlands International

Background on the event

Source-to-sea management is a game changing holistic approach across sectoral and administrative boundaries. It aims to balance social, environmental and economic priorities by recognizing the linkages between land, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, and bringing together upstream and downstream stakeholders. The goal of source-to-sea management is to ensure healthy ecosystems and resilient societies, by facilitating sustainable and lasting solutions linking several SDGs beyond just SDG6. The event shared concrete examples from various cases worldwide on how source-to-sea management has been applied in practice, showcasing lessons learned, success stories, barriers faced and how these have been overcome.

Water Action Agenda (including where possible/applicable the link to the respective commitments in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))

- GWP, UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and SIWI commits to implement the Healthy Rivers Healthy Oceans programme – A Source-to-sea action programme to reduce unsustainable land and water resources management pressures on

river basins and seas. <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/healthy-rivers-healthy-oceans-source-sea-action-programme-reduce-unsustainable-land>

- SIWI commits to support collective action on the Water Action Agenda, good governance, Water for Climate, Source-to-Sea and cooperation. <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/siwi-commits-support-collective-action-water-action-agenda-good-governance-water>
- Greece commits to promote the Source-to-Sea approach and take all necessary measures to ensure Good Environmental Status (GES) for all its territorial marine waters with regard to eutrophication and polluting substances releases from point and diffuse land-based pollution sources, by 2030.

Key Issues discussed

- For source-to-sea action to happen, it is important to determine the basin and the marine areas of intervention, as well as the science/knowledge, policy, legal, institutional and financial needs and gaps and address the root causes of these shortcomings.
- Awareness raising and knowledge strengthening among stakeholders about the upstream-downstream linkages of ecosystems and other natural processes across the entire water cycle is important for the integrated management of the source-to-sea systems and related actions should be further promoted.
- It is crucial to close the tap of pollution upstream to protect and restore marine ecosystems. This requires coordination and collaboration among stakeholders from source to sea.
- We need to build on existing institutional frameworks, especially legally binding ones (e.g. LBS and ICZM Protocols under Regional Seas Conventions) and enlarge their interlinkages, impact and “interoperability” to achieve a broader “whole water cycle” approach. Replicating successful examples in areas that appropriate institutional frameworks are absent, should be sought.
- To achieve a holistic source-to-sea management, it is important to first adopt a local, a systemic as well as a functional approach in order to ensure connectivity and concerted actions at scale.
- The 9th “Our Ocean Conference” to be hosted by Greece in 2024 that will focus inter alia on addressing marine pollution, climate change impacts and the need for holistic management at the coastal interface, offers an opportunity to take further the UNWC results and discussions and feed them into global oceans’ related process, to strengthen collaborations across the entire water cycle.

Key recommendations for action

- Break silos in everyday work: Encourage cross sectoral and spatial, upstream-downstream coordination and collaboration engaging stakeholders from source to sea. This needs to occur both at the international and intranational levels. Additionally, bring the source-to-sea message to other communities where holistic management

plays a key role to achieve their goals such as biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- Action at city level: Cities of all sizes play a key role in source-to-sea systems, and source-to-sea management perspectives need to be included in their governance frameworks to ensure a healthy water cycle.
- Identify science and knowledge needs: Source-to-sea systems are highly complex. It is important to identify the science needed, build bridges between disciplines and scientific communities, enhance knowledge on the “interface” between the freshwater and marine spheres, promote citizens’ and social science, provide finance and create inclusive platforms for knowledge sharing and exchange, considering “language” differences. The UN Decade of Ocean Science can play a key role in facilitating this interdisciplinary approach.
- Institutional context: Institutional settings at national as well as transboundary level need to be adjusted to address upstream-downstream and cross-sectoral interlinkages.
- Innovative financing: Financial models and investments need to include source-to-sea perspectives to encourage source-to-sea actions. GEF 8 is an example of advancing this type of financing across sectors.
- Strengthen linkages between the freshwater and marine communities: The 9th “Our Ocean Conference” to be hosted by Greece in 2024 and the 2025 UN Ocean Conference to be co-hosted by Costa Rica and France are crucial opportunities to continue accelerating action for the health of the full water cycle.