Managing, protecting, conserving, and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems
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Torgny Holmgren Lead discussant

Dear friends, ladies, and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to this important event.

Another reason why I am grateful to be here is that not too long ago I probably would have been considered an unexpected guest at an Oceans conference, as I come from the freshwater community.

I guess most people not working directly on ocean issues tend to be quite unaware of the fact that we all depend on healthy oceans for our survival. At the same time, I believe many people passionate about the ocean underestimate the pressure that comes from land-based sources.

Luckily, this is finally starting to change and that is the perspective I would like to bring to our discussion today. ***Scaling up ocean action***, what this conference is all about, must start with improving how we care for marine and coastal ecosystems.

As this conference is focused on partnerships and solutions. I find that the only lasting solutions come from a strong partnership between actors on land and at sea.

This is something that we at SIWI are advocating for. Our experts in water governance help decision-makers around the world manage their water resources to sustain ecosystems, protect livelihoods and ensure that all people have access to clean water.

in the past few decades, human activity has fundamentally altered ecosystems to a dangerous degree. The water cycle is increasingly broken due to global heating, increasing demand for resources, and changes in land use. We are now starting to understand the dangers this presents to both humans and nature. We rely on healthy ecosystems for our food, clean water, and energy, as well as for climate regulation, and carbon sequestration. Now all this is at risk as ecosystems decline or even collapse. We are soon risking reaching a tipping point where wetlands and oceans are turning from carbon sinks to carbon emitters.

So, what can be done?

The first step is of course to raise awareness of the fundamental interlinkages between land, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems from source to sea. We see cascading effects, from terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems to the coast and the ocean. The health of coastal and marine ecosystems is threatened by untreated wastewater, fertilizer run-off, industrial waste, and plastic pollution as well as the draining of wetlands, damming of rivers, and too much or too little sediment.

To better understand how activities on land and in rivers affect coastal and ocean ecosystems, we must invest in science, education, and monitoring of the social, environmental, and economic linkages across the ***source-to-sea continuum***.

But just having the knowledge at hand is not enough. We also need to do something. And that means changing how we govern our societies and manage our resources.

Let me give you ***two examples*** of why this is so important.

First, just a year ago, more than 200 people in Europe died after catastrophic rainfalls and flooding in several countries. While this horrific event happened upstream of the ocean, it gives an example of how localized thinking can manifest in dangerous ways downstream.

Climate change will make this type of weather extremes more common in the future. But we can limit the suffering and costs by changing how we manage water and infrastructure. We can save lives if planners and decision-makers learn to always ask the question “and what are the consequences downstream of this?”

This fundamental question forms the basis for us at SIWI taking the lead in the development of the **source-to-sea approach to governance.**

The second example demonstrates how a downstream approach helps the ocean. We are supporting the implementation of the source-to-sea approach in the ***Hoi An in Vietnam*** where plastic pollution is a major problem. Mismanaged plastic is washed into rivers and ultimately the ocean not only from Hoi An, but from upstream communities. To halt this flow of plastics, we

are bringing together stakeholders across the plastic value chain to strengthen accountability for their roles in preventing plastic pollution.

From those two examples we learn – that we need different actors upstream to understand the downstream impacts of their infrastructure, production, consumption, farming, and wastewater handling. This means we need institutions and incentives that make decision-makers upstream take into consideration the impact on and interests of people and nature further downstream

Globally, ***fragmented governance*** is a grave and underestimated threat to making this happen. We need to move away from today's siloed thinking and fragmentation across sectors and move toward holistic approaches. We need to catalyze source-to-sea action at global, regional, national, and subnational levels by mainstreaming source-to-sea thinking in the design and implementation of projects, plans, governance frameworks and investments. One of the benefits of source-to-sea thinking is that it makes decision-makers aware of unintended side effects and trade-offs before they move forward.

With so little time left to save the ocean and the degradation of nature, we just cannot afford to make the wrong choices.

This is important from several perspectives.

One is justice, to address poverty. Unsustainable demand for marine resources as well as an endless flow of pollution place the livelihoods of more than three billion people at risk globally. With intensifying pressure on natural resources, local communities and people living in poverty are increasingly put at risk due to ecosystem changes. Their food and livelihoods can disappear overnight as a result of decisions far away that they cannot influence.

Inclusion is therefore fundamental in source-to-sea management. Both to ensure that investment, production, and consumption respect the linkages between land, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. And so that benefits are shared equitably.

Women, men, young and old must be part of the decision-making, including the voices and concerns of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and vulnerable groups.

These perspectives also help us find better and more effective solutions to complex challenges like ***climate change.*** We know the harmful impact of global warming for the ocean with sea level rise, coral bleaching, loss of breeding grounds, extreme weather events, and coastal erosion.

Water bodies, wetlands and oceans are critical in mitigating climate change. Less well-known is that efforts to mitigate climate change can sometimes also have unintended consequences. Changes in land and water use patterns for power generation may disturb biota, sediment, and nutrient flows to the ocean.

[Flood defence infrastructure may create problems by limiting the fresh- and saltwater exchanges necessary for productive waterways and brackish ecosystems.]

To handle the many threats that span land, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems is not easy, as we are often content to focus on what we know best. Here, the ***Source-to -sea approach*** offers a useful starting point and toolbox.

The **Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management**, was established a few years ago as a broad network of organizations committed to promoting, implementing, and building expertise in source-to-sea management aiming to strengthen cooperation between upstream and downstream interests for the benefit of all actors involved Today more than 35 partners have joined spanning from multilateral organizations, and governments, to civil society organizations, the business sector, and academia. I invite all of you all to join this movement and platform to save the ocean, starting at the source,

This is our chance to act. By working together, from source to sea, we can still develop solutions that save the ocean and bring us to a more water wise world.

Thank you.

Concluding remarks (approx. 1 minute)

I really would like to thank everyone here today for a very interesting discussion. There have been so many insightful observations and reflections, contributing to our understanding of the complex issue of ocean health. And I think this speaks to the point I raised earlier, about the importance of source-to-sea thinking. We need more of these nuanced conversations from different starting points. Only then can we develop truly effective solutions.

Listening here today, it is clear that the time has come for this holistic approach to governance. There is a new understanding of how the state of the ocean and coastal marine environments are an indicator of the sustainability of our actions not only at sea but also on land, along rivers, and at the coast.

I, therefore, encourage decision-makers around the world to come together to create meaningful change through policy reforms, sustainable financing, and frameworks that drive stakeholder collaboration.

We need to replace today's fragmented governance and siloed thinking with a new approach that recognizes how dependent we are on each other and on nature.

Thank you.