



## UN Water Conference: Side Event

**Stronger together: Building resilience and prosperity through integrated and evidence-based management of the Ocean–Water continuum**

**A ‘Game Changing’ UN Water and UN Oceans Side Event**

**Concept Note & Program**

**23 March 2023 – 1:15 PM to 2:30 PM EST Conference Room 4 UNHQ, New York**

### CONTEXT

**The current triple-planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution significantly impact the function and value of freshwater and coastal and marine ecosystems.** While there are many ongoing efforts to resolve the crises, progress remains slow and limited in scale. Solving this requires more holistic, integrated and evidence-based approaches. However, today’s governance systems are too fragmented to halt the destructive practices that are putting the valuable natural capital<sup>1</sup> of our ocean and fresh water in danger. What is needed is action to bring system-wide, long-lasting change.

**The importance of the ocean and seas in the water cycle cannot be overstated and their health depends largely on both direct sea-based and indirect land-based impacts.** However, ecosystem management often exists in siloes without consideration of the broader implications or impacts to adjacent ecosystems. This is certainly the case in the aquatic realm where freshwater (inland) ecosystems including rivers and lakes are managed separately from coastal and marine ecosystems. Therefore, highlighting the synergies between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 14 and 6, and their profound contributions across all other SDGs, is crucial to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

**Aquatic ecosystems [freshwater and marine] support entire communities and industries, sustains hundreds of millions of jobs, help drive the modern global economy, and are crucial to food security and poverty alleviation in the most vulnerable regions.** The ocean economy for example, contributes more than USD \$1.5 trillion each year to the global economy and is the basis of diverse cultural practices

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<sup>1</sup> Natural capital are natural assets in their role of providing natural resource inputs and environmental services for economic production (OECD definition).





around the world. It is also the single largest active carbon and heat sink – absorbing more than 90 percent of excess heat and around 30 percent of anthropogenic CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. Healthy aquatic ecosystems, both freshwater and marine, protect economic assets and investments from the impacts of climate change, and underpin ecosystem goods and services that are crucial for sustainable development. A ‘nature positive’ approach enriches biodiversity, stores carbon, purifies water and reduces pandemic risk which enhances the resilience of our planet and our societies.

**Rapid [unchecked] coastal development and disjointed planning, including in connection to inland ecosystems have put unsustainable pressure on the world’s ocean.** Consequently, the world water ways are facing a global crisis due to pollution, overexploitation of its resources, biodiversity loss, warming, acidification, rising sea levels, reduced freshwater inflows, and coastal erosion, to name but a few challenges.

**Effective collaboration is essential to tackle threats across aquatic ecosystems, breaking down silos between land, coastal and marine communities and institutions, and working across sectoral, policy and administrative borders.** Collaborations must be established and sustained between relevant actors – policymakers, the private sector, scientists, civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities – to proactively co-create integrated solutions. Critical gaps in science, knowledge and capacity however hinder our collective ability to manage across the land – freshwater – coastal – ocean continuum. Action must be taken to address the whole water cycle and ensure that benefits accrue across its entirety, preserving the integrity of cyclic upstream-downstream environmental assets.

**Approaches and tools such as ‘Source-to-Sea’, ‘Ridge-to-Reef’, Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), and integrated watershed management, identify the links between land, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, stimulate cooperation between upstream and downstream actors, and promote policy integration as well as coordination across sectors.** These approaches help us make the connections more explicit and foster increased collaboration breaking the siloes and prioritizing justice, equity, and inclusion across ecosystems and communities. Adopting these approaches to developing sustainable and lasting solutions requires strong collaboration across ecosystem boundaries with the inclusion of local, indigenous and scientific knowledge to ensures equitable access to skills, technology and relevant data.

**The connectivity of healthy and productive aquatic ecosystems forms the basis of a ‘nature positive economy’ with benefits spanning along the spectrum of inland and coastal communities.** Taking these linkages into account and applying a holistic view of the whole water cycle, will result in greater benefits for the entire system.

**Adopting holistic, integrated and evidence-based management approaches is a critical step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDGs 6 and 14).** The UN Ocean Conference held in Lisbon, Portugal in June 2022 highlighted the need to raise awareness of the fundamental interlinkages between land, freshwater and the ocean, and to invest in science, education, and concrete





action for integrated management and decision-making. The Declaration “Our ocean, our future, our responsibility” adopted during the 2022 UN Ocean Conference recognizes the vital role of the ocean, the challenges it faces and how holistic, integrated and evidence-based management approaches can contribute to its restoration and protection.

**As coordinating platforms across the UN system, UN-Oceans and UN-Water are uniquely placed to work together to convene actors in a systematic exploration of the most effective recommendations for impactful collective action across the land-freshwater-coastal-ocean continuum.** The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration provide complementary global frameworks for diverse actors to transform these recommendations into action by identifying critical gaps in understanding, and in co-designing and co-delivering transformative science-based solutions to priority challenges.

**The proposed side event will explore the interconnected nature and critical importance of the land – freshwater – coastal – ocean continuum, and the necessary steps and actions to systematically address the drivers of ecosystem degradation in an integrated manner.** More specifically, the side event will aim to highlight the key gaps for holistic management in the areas of knowledge/capacity; finance; collaboration; and governance in the ocean-water continuum. Furthermore, the event will contribute to the Water Action Agenda by showcasing game changing solutions and key Voluntary Commitments for addressing the barriers towards holistic water and ocean action. The discussions planned are closely related to the UN Water Conference’s Interactive Dialogue 3: “Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and DRR (SDGs 6.5, 6.6, 7, 11.5, 13, 14, 15).”

## OBJECTIVES OF THE SIDE-EVENT

The objectives of the side event will be

- (i) To highlight the important interlinkages between SDGs 6 and 14 among others, and review actions that benefit the whole water cycle
- (ii) To highlight the critical importance of holistic, integrated approaches to addressing the challenges to aquatic ecosystem health from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution
- (iii) To review possible collaborative action and game changers/voluntary commitments across the ocean-water continuum, including at the UN system level, to fill critical science and knowledge gaps that will support collective action to tackle the drivers of declining aquatic ecosystem health and loss of natural capital.





UN  
2023 WATER  
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK  
22-24  
MARCH  
2023

## SIDE EVENT HOSTS / PARTNERS

- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
- UN Water
- UN-Oceans (OLA/DOALOS as focal points)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- UNESCO IOC
- Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

## TENTATIVE AGENDA, SPEAKERS & LOGISTICS [TBD]

**Event duration:** 75 minutes total

**Co-Hosts:** DESA, DOALOS, UN Water, UNEP, UNESCO IOC, SIWI

<b>MASTER OF CEREMONY: Ms. Leanne Burney</b> , Program Officer, UN Water	
<b>High Level Opening Segment</b>	
<b>10 min [3 mins per speaker]</b>	<b>H.E. <a href="#">Ms. Ana Paula Zacarias</a></b> Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations
	<b>H.E. <a href="#">Mr. Li Junhua</a></b> Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
	<b>Mr. Stephen Mathias</b> Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs (UN-Oceans Focal point)





Keynote [Ted Talk style] and highlights	
<b>7 min</b>	<p><b>Ms. Oriana Romano</b>, Head of Unit, Water Governance and Circular Economy, OECD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding and addressing key gaps for holistic management in the areas of knowledge/capacity; finance; collaboration; and governance</li> </ul>
<b>3 min</b>	<p><b>Ms. Susan Gardner</b>, Director, Ecosystems Division, UNEP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linking this side event with Interactive Dialogue 3 – particularly the aspects related to S2S</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panel [“Davos style” moderated conversation weaving in Q&amp;A]: Showcasing game changing solutions for addressing the barriers for holistic water and ocean action</b></p>	
<p><b>Panel Moderator: Mr. Jakob Granit</b>, Director General, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwaM)</p>	
<b>40 min</b>	<p><b>Ms. Ruth Mathews</b>, Senior Manager, Stockholm International Water Institute, Coordinator, Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management</p> <hr/> <p><b>Ms. Jodie Miller</b>, Head of the Isotope Hydrology Section, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)</p> <hr/> <p><b>Mr. Julian Barbieri</b>, Head, Marine Policy and Regional Implementation Section, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC)</p> <hr/> <p><b>Mr. Christian Borja</b>, Global Lead Cost Benefit of Water, World Bank Group</p>



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### Closing Remarks

3 min

[Mr Máximo Torero](#), Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

3 min

H.E. Ms. [Maritza Chan Valverde](#),  
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

**TOTAL TIME : 65 Minutes**

~10 minutes remaining as buffer

