Concept Note for the Ministerial Roundtable 2
of the High-Level Symposium on Water

Lisbon, 27th of June 2022

Ministerial Roundtable 2: Water and Sanitation Services bridging SDG6 and SDG14

Topics to be addressed:

- The impact of human behaviour in reducing marine pollution
- Wastewater and stormwater management on pollution control
- The circular (blue) economy

Oceans are the last receiver of sediments, waste and pollution generated upstream on rivers and on mainland overall. Everything ends washed up in the oceans and humans have a huge responsibility in the reduction of this type of marine pollution through changes in consumption patterns, reduction of waste production, recycling and many other practices that are harmful to the amount of waste reaching the oceans.

Water services, which comprise wastewater and stormwater management, are fundamental actors to manage the quality of wastewater treated and reduce pollution downstream in rivers and oceans. Effective wastewater treatment plants can now reduce pollution up to residual values, greatly improving the quality of inland and coastal waters, boosting economic development and other blue economy activities, such as tourism or fishing, but also the environment and quality of life.

Storms also play a relevant part in washing this waste to rivers and from there to the oceans. Stormwater management through active and passive interventions in urban context can have an important effect in reducing flooding events and in better managing wastewater flowing to wastewater treatment plants, hence, allowing for even more effective and resilient systems.

Climate change is having a huge impact in water resources availability worldwide. Water reuse is another way water utilities can benefit water bodies, by avoiding the

need for further water abstraction, especially in water scarce areas where water quantity is relevant to reduce the likelihood of saline intrusion episodes which could further deplete water resources.

As renewable energy production costs are getting consistently lower, sea water is increasingly seen as an important alternative to create resilience to water supply. Desalination plants are more and more common worldwide, especially in water scarce areas, where other water sources are difficult to find and water transport costs are increasingly higher. It is important, however, to promote adequate environmental impact assessment for this type of investments, since by-products of these processes can significantly impact on marine life.

Increased cooperation between different national institutions responsible for managing water services, for regulating and monitoring quality of service provided, for ensuring environmental protection and monitoring of quality of inland and coastal waters can generate better practices and ensure a more effective monitoring of pollution sources and intervene to reduce and penalize the responsible for its production. Since in most cases, water bodies pollution impacts mostly other countries which were not responsible for producing that pollution cooperation at the international level is fundamental not only to ensure reduction of sea water pollution, but to reduce distortions in competition between countries and externalities on downstream economic activities.

Finally, we must realize that all these inter-relations and interactions between inland waters and ocean assume even more relevance in the context of climate change. Ocean acidification, sea level rise and extreme water-related events, droughts and floods, are some of the impacts of climate change, and the society need to work together to adapt and mitigate their effects. Despite the progress made so far, the actions for the achievement of SDG 14 and SDG 6 are insufficient, in part due to limited coordination between the ocean and freshwater communities, and collaborative action as established in SDG 17 is imperative if these goals are to be met, especially in a context of climate change.

Topics to be discussed:

1. Water services are instrumental to ensure adequate water resources management. Water losses control, water reuse, rainwater harvesting, desalination / reduction of point and diffuse pollution / saline intrusion control, and change consumption patterns through awareness and education. What can be done at the international level to create common guidelines to ensure the adoption of best practices in these areas?
2. Managing of urban wastewater pollution is a responsibility of each country's water services, but their impacts are mostly felt downstream in rivers or oceans. How can Governments and national institutions collaborate to ensure

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the reduction of pollution sources upstream and what economic instruments can be created to reflect these externalities?

3. Urban stormwater management is in many cases a local responsibility but in order to be effective it requires a regional, national or even international joint strategy. What can be done at the political level to foster the creation of these joint strategies?

4. Climate change is increasingly impacting freshwater resources availability, but economic instruments are still inefficient in reflecting the actual cost of freshwater, especially in water scarce areas. What practices should be implemented to foster water savings by consumers and on promoting water circularity through treated wastewater for reuse? What is the role of water abstraction fees and what economic instruments can be used to promote the use of treated wastewater for non-potable uses?

5. Seawater is also an increasingly relevant source of potable water in some areas of the world with desalination being seen as a more resilient source of water. However, this option has considerable environmental impacts in terms of rejects and, despite efficiency has greatly improved, it has nonetheless significant energy costs. How can these environmental impacts be reduced and how to impute an economic value on the use of these resources?