

HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIUM ON WATER

Lisbon, 27th of June 2022

Bridging SDG 6 and SDG 14
Fresh and salt water communities working together

Main Findings of the High-Level Symposium on Water – Special Event of the United Nations Ocean Conference – 27th June 2022

The High-level Symposium on Water “Bridging SDG 6 and SDG 14” was one of the four Special Events on the United Nations Ocean Conference and one of the preparatory events for the United Nations Water Conference, which will take place in March 2023, in New York.

The main goal of this Symposium was to strengthen the interlinkage and communication between the fresh and saltwater communities, helping to ensure that, at international level, water is seen as it should be – as a vital, precious and scarce resource, that knows no borders and is integrated into a single cycle.

During the afternoon of the 27th of June, the Government of Portugal, with the support of the Governments of Argentina, Mozambique and Singapore and the United Nations, and in closed cooperation with the Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands, as co-hosts of the 2023 Conference, has sought to highlight the most relevant themes of water management, be it fresh or salt.

The event was attended by 15 high-level speakers and about 500 in person participants, with 1.578 video views live on the broadcast UN Web TV.

The following conclusions from this Symposium can be highlighted:

- This Symposium was a unique opportunity and a clear signal of the political interest, as well as of the scientific, business, and civil society communities’ interest in this interlinkage.
- Nevertheless, the path towards integration is still long, and the data points to the fact that there is still a significant gap to be filled in terms of water management and ocean health.
- Closing the remaining gaps in the access to safe drinking water, sanitation or even waste management is crucial, if we want a healthy ocean.

- The Ocean is an integral part of the hydrological cycle, and its health depends, to a large extent, on the management of inland and coastal waters and associated ecosystems, as well as water and sanitation services.
- Transboundary cooperation on the planning and management of shared river basins, as well as in coastal zones, must be strengthened and consolidated to respond to all the challenges “from source to sea”.
- It is necessary to reinforce the collaboration between decision-makers and researchers in the implementation of public policies and in the coordination mechanisms among different political areas.
- It is important to highlight the role of coastal wetlands – marshes, sea grasslands and mangroves – and pay more attention to them, remembering their fundamental role as carbon sinks, as some scientists argue they have an even greater potential than terrestrial forests.
- Marine litter is a threat, not only to marine species and ecosystems, but also to human health and well-being, with a negative impact on several economic sectors.
- The historical resolution adopted by UNEA 5 (Resolution 5/14 entitled “End plastic pollution: Towards an International legally binding instrument”) requires commitment to be duly implemented by the end of 2024.
- Drought is one of the visible faces of climate change and it is severely impacting several countries, like Portugal. It should thus be a higher priority on the political agenda.
- Growing urbanization in coastal areas has not been accompanied by the necessary infrastructure, namely in developing countries, making the connection of SDGs 6 and 14 more challenging.
- Without safe water and sanitation, the reduction of marine pollution from wastewater and stormwater cannot be achieved.
- The Human Rights to water and sanitation need to be guaranteed in practice.
- The necessary investments in water and sanitation infrastructure will not by themselves solve existing problems if they are not accompanied by a real climate change adaptation strategy.

- The adoption of a holistic approach from “source to sea” is critical to a circular vision of human water use and to create financial, legal, and regulatory instruments that are essential for the implementation of these public policies.
- It is fundamental to provide the same and better services with less resources, evolving from a concept of linear infrastructures to one of circular infrastructures.
- It is crucial that usual top/down approaches are complemented with bottom/up approaches, to guarantee an increasing involvement of local communities, and to ensure that implemented actions also contribute to the elimination of existing inequalities.
- Partnerships are key to our planet’s sustainability. There are already good examples of local, bilateral projects, with public and private partners, but it is necessary to accelerate actions on the ground and to scale up successful solutions.
- Skills to protect coastal waters from the impacts of stormwater, agricultural effluents, industrial and urban wastewater must be strengthened.
- It is essential to strengthen and improve communication on the value of water, so that society adopts better daily practices to protect and conserve this resource, whether it is freshwater or saltwater.
- A paradigm shift to manage water as a precious resource is essential. Economic and financial instruments are essential and need to be efficient.
- The 2023 UN Water Conference will be a critical moment to connect the world around water, leaving no one behind (with an all-inclusive approach) and defining concrete actions at the global level, given water’s cross-cutting role for sustainable development.