

Better management of the land-sea continuum: for shared benefits between continental, coastal and marine waters



June 2025

The French Water Partnership's call to action on the occasion of the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference

MESSAGE 1

Integrate the essential role of inland waters in the health of coastal and marine environments into the declarations and work of the United Nations Ocean Conferences, starting with UNOC-3.³

MESSAGE 2

Overcome sectoral silos and systematically include a freshwater component in all United Nations Ocean Conferences.

MESSAGE 3

Protecting marine waters requires action to **reduce chemical and biological pollution from the continents**: untreated wastewater, rainwater run-offs, agricultural and industrial waste, and solid waste carried by waterways.

Although marine waters are at the heart of the UNOC-3 agenda, the continuum between inland, coastal and marine waters is not explicitly included in the 8 priority areas of the Conference¹. However, the interconnected nature of aquatic ecosystems means that actions taken in continental waters, particularly in terms of pollution prevention, have a direct impact on the health of marine ecosystems as well as human health. This was one of the reasons for the adoption on 17 May 1980 of the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution from Land-Based Sources by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the Coastal States of the Mediterranean Region, and is also what is documented in the European Starfish 2030 Mission.²

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Strengthening ocean protection requires action on the pollution carried by the hydrographic network — plastics, microplastics, chemical contaminants — by improving the management of sanitation and diffuse pollution at the scale of catchment basins. Target 3 of SDG 6, which aims to improve water quality by reducing pollution and halving the proportion of untreated wastewater worldwide, and target 1 of SDG 14 on the prevention and reduction of marine pollution, in particular that resulting from land-based activities, are directly related. They should form an integral part of the programme of this UN Ocean Conference in order to promote synergies for the joint preservation of continental, coastal and marine waters. This applies more broadly to the objective of protecting 30% of marine and terrestrial areas by 2030, set under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which cannot be achieved without greater recognition of the shared challenges of the land-sea continuum.

In addition, measures taken to combat the degradation of aquatic ecosystems must ensure that they remain hydrologically connected through ecological continuity between glaciers, rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater from source to sea.³

Adopting a global vision of the land-sea continuum and promoting coordinated management of continental, coastal and marine waters is essential if the commitments made in UNOC-3 are to have a positive impact on all the ecosystems in the continuum and the human societies that depend on them. Such management must be transparent, democratic, inclusive, concerted and science-based, so as to integrate the needs and uses of the various stakeholders associated with continental, coastal and marine waters.

¹ French Ministry for Ecological Transition, Biodiversity, Forestry, the Sea and Fisheries, "The eight objectives of the Third United Nations Conference on the Ocean announced at SOS Ocean", 07/04/2025, Link: [SOS Ocean: eight objectives of UNOC-3 | Ministry for Ecological Transition, Biodiversity, Forestry, the Sea and Fisheries](https://www.sos-ocean.fr/en/8-objectives-of-unoc-3)

² European Commission, Starfish Mission 2030, September 2020, Link: [Starfish Mission 2030 - Publications Office of the EU](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-09/starfish_mission_2030_en.pdf). The report of the European Starfish Mission 2030 (September 2020) calls for an integrated approach to the health of the oceans, seas, inland waters (surface and groundwater) and coastal waters by 2030, taking particular account of the pollution affecting them.

³ Target A of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Cooperation between the bodies set up under the Rio Conventions is gaining momentum on the world political stage. While each Convention tackles water issues from a specific angle (land degradation, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation), the management of water and the land-sea continuum calls for greater cooperation between the 3 Conventions on this particular issue, in response to these interdependencies.

Overcome sectoral silos and systematically include a freshwater component in all United Nations Ocean Conferences.

Recognize the importance of freshwater and aquatic ecosystems in achieving the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements and the 2030 Agenda.

The aim is to ensure that **the joint importance of continental, coastal and marine waters and the associated aquatic ecosystems on which we all depend is taken into account in the work of the 3 Rio Conventions (UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD), the forthcoming UN conferences on oceans and water, and the work on the 2030 and post-2030 Agendas.** These interdependencies are illustrated by the common challenges and the need for coordinated action to achieve SDGs 2, 6, 13, 14 and 15 in particular.

In this context, **it is essential to promote interdisciplinarity and inclusive multi-sectoral dialogue.** This could be illustrated, for example, by closer cooperation between scientific bodies, which could lead to the publication of joint cross-sectoral reports between the IPCC, IPBES, HLPE (CFS) and IPOS⁴.

We are calling for sectoral "silos" to be broken down and for a "freshwater" component to be systematically included in all the United

Nations thematic summits on the oceans, with a view to achieving the many water-related ambitions of the Agenda 2030 in an operational way, in particular those of SDGs 6 and 14, by mobilizing all the stakeholders who can contribute to them, for example those from agriculture and fisheries, regional planning, energy, industry, etc.

Towards an ambitious global treaty against plastic pollution

The FWP calls for an ambitious global treaty against plastic pollution, while reiterating the importance of taking simultaneous action against other forms of pollution that are damaging the health of the oceans and humans.

Protecting marine ecosystems' health, as well as human health, means controlling the quantities of pollutants, nutrients and oxygen demand discharged by rivers into the seas and oceans. Yet the volumes of wastewater discharged without appropriate pollution treatment are enormous. The global share of domestic wastewater discharged into the environment without appropriate treatment was estimated at 42% in 2022⁵, which makes it impossible to achieve the SDG 6.3 target of halving it. As for industrial

⁴ IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; IPBES: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; HLPE: High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, IPOS: International Platform on Ocean Sustainability.

⁵ SDG Indicator 6.3.1 according to "Progress on the proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated - Mid-term status of SDG Indicator 6.3.1 and acceleration needs ...", UN-Habitat and WHO, 2024

wastewater discharges, only 27% were treated safely, an estimate based on limited data from 22 countries. In addition to these sources of pollution, there are stormwater run-offs that carry pollution from leaching from soils and buildings, flows that can increase in the event of extreme rainfall events linked to climate change. There are also discharges of nutrients from agricultural activities, particularly nitrates and phosphates, which affect coastal waters, as well as the dumping of waste.

Protecting marine waters requires action to reduce chemical and biological pollution from the continents: untreated wastewater, rainwater run-offs, agricultural and industrial waste, and solid waste carried by waterways.

The Mangrove Breakthrough initiative

This initiative is both a call to action and an operational framework aimed at accelerating the restoration of mangroves and mobilizing investment from state and non-state actors. To date, some fifty countries have signed up.

Governments are strongly encouraged to join Mangrove Breakthrough, and to make a significant contribution to the necessary funding. (Global Mangrove Alliance estimate: \$4bn by 2030).

The FWP is a member of the French Initiative for the Mangrove Breakthrough, a group made up of key stakeholders identified on the theme of mangroves. The aim of this initiative is to pool French know-how in order to best contribute to the Mangrove Breakthrough.

The actions to be taken to achieve the SDG target 14.1 on marine pollution resulting from land-based activities include the enhancement of land-based infrastructures, whether grey or green, such as sewage systems, soil desilting, or the restoration of ecosystems such as wetlands - for example mangroves, salt marshes or seagrass beds. The role of these solutions is crucial to the health of freshwater and ocean ecosystems, whose degradation, sometimes exacerbated by climate change, has significant social, economic and environmental impacts.

Among these levers for action, **Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Climate Resilience** can promote coordinated management of inland waters, soils and coastal and marine environments, and deliver major co-benefits. This is the case, for example, with the mangroves mentioned above, which combine ecological restoration, carbon capture and resilience of coastal communities to the risks posed by natural disasters.

Local integration and inclusive governance characterize this approach⁶. NbS are a lever for ecological, social, political and economic co-benefits, particularly in coastal areas, by maintaining the essential functions of ecosystems in watersheds.

7for amplifying and accelerating the implementation of all these solutions aimed at

⁶ IUCN, "IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions", 2020, Link: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-020-Fr.pdf>

reducing pollution of continental, coastal and marine waters. To achieve this, we believe that **diversification of funding sources** is necessary⁸ and calls for the coordinated “massification” of public funds and private investments at all levels of governance. Finally, we believe that it is vital to **invest in capacity-building** to implement these solutions and develop an integrated vision of the land-sea continuum. Targeted training for stakeholders could lead to better multi-sectoral coordination to ensure sustainable management of the hydrological cycle and associated ecosystems, from source to sea.

Cross-border cooperation

60% of rivers are shared by at least two countries. However, only 59% of their length is covered by operational cooperation agreements between riparian countries (SDG indicator 6.5.2): on water withdrawal, pollution prevention, benefit sharing, etc. The transboundary nature of these watercourses adds complexity to the management of river basins, and these are all additional risks for the quantity and quality of the water that reaches the river mouths.

In this respect, we would point out that the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes can be ratified by all Member States of the United Nations and provides relevant legal provisions for managing these shared ecosystems and water resources.

⁸ Target 19 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The French Water Partnership

The French Water Partnership (FWP) is the key platform for French public, private and associative water stakeholders active on the international stage. For over 15 years, it has been advocating on an international level to improve the way water-related issues are taken into account in various actions and policies, and promoting exchanges between French know-how and that of other countries. Today, the FWP brings together some 200 members, who represent the very essence of water management in France. These members are grouped into the following 6 constituencies: The Government and its public bodies; NGOs, associations and foundations; Local authorities and members of parliament; Economic stakeholders; Research and training institutions; French and foreign individuals.

*The activities of the FWP are made possible
thanks to the active support of our
members and our financial partners.*



*We sincerely thank our partners for their trust
and indefectible support.*