

Welcoming remarks by Ambassador Peter Thomson, United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, delivered in the form of a video message at the [Global Workshop on Source-to-sea Management](#); 14 December 2022, Geneva/online

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to address you today on the ethos of source-to-sea management, a subject that is central to our communal responsibility to protect the fast-diminishing biodiversity of Planet Earth.

The connections between the freshwater and saltwater ecosystems, indeed the linkage between SDG6 and SDG14, are as inescapable as the hydrological cycle itself. And thanks to our anthropogenic greenhouse gases and other profligate human activities, great planetary changes are underway, with profound consequences for the hydrological cycle. The ocean is warming leading to rising sea levels with obvious effects on freshwater aquifers, and to changing regional rainfall patterns with resulting terrestrial effects of widespread flooding and drought.

But it is what comes back to the ocean from the land in the hydrological cycle that concerns us most in source-to-sea management. Instead of pristine water flowing back into the ocean filtered through forests, rivers, groundwater and wetlands, the water now carries with it the detritus of human civilization: the unwanted excess of our agricultural and industrial systems, antibiotics and other medicines, plastics, microplastics and a proliferation of toxic chemicals. We put these pollutants into the water's flow, so it is us who must remove them, or prevent their entry in the first place, in order for biodiversity to flourish in the ocean. I emphasise that these words are not hyperbole, for we are by now fully aware of the ocean's proliferation of dead zones and its generally declining health.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms the integrated nature of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and there is little doubt that collaborative actions are the necessary glue of the SDGs if we are to achieve them. And so, when we consider pollution, let us recall that SDG 6.3 calls for improvements to water quality and wastewater treatment, while SDG 14.1 demands reduction of marine pollution, in particular from land-based activities.

This was the underlying logic of our holding the High-Level Symposium on Water on the first day of the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon last June. It is also the reason we have called for SDG14, Source-to-Sea and the hydrological cycle to be integral elements of the UN Water Conference to be held in New York 22 to 24 March next year.

May I take this opportunity also to emphasise that it is incumbent upon us all in these uncertain times to ramp up our ambitions and advocacy for robust outcomes from the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee ongoing deliberations to develop a legally binding global instrument to control plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many poor-performing pollution issues in rivers, coastal zones and the ocean originate from fragmented governance, with organizations and agencies responsible for their health often not strongly linked. Under the Source-to-Sea approach we aim to break these silos and bridge existing gaps in freshwater, coastal and marine environmental management.

I note that the Global Workshop on Source-to-Sea Management is organized for the first time, under the framework of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, often called the Water Convention, or 1992 Helsinki Convention. The Water Convention emphasizes national and international measures to reduce pollution of the marine environment, in particular coastal areas, from land-based sources. Meanwhile, the Watercourses Convention, also known as the 1997 New York Convention, also aims to protect and preserve the marine environment. These conventions are trusted frameworks in our efforts to make peace with Nature, and I join with the UN's Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, in firmly encouraging all countries to accede to the two UN conventions so that we may universally improve coastal management.

From UNEA5 to the UN Ocean Conference, from the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to UNFCCC's COP27, we have maintained the focus on fresh and salt water, which is at it should be on a planet on which water is the ultimate source and sustainer of life. Right now, at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, we are hard at work on protecting biodiversity, with water a fundamental aspect of all considerations.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I encourage you to seize the opportunities provided by this timely workshop to establish new partnerships, build bridges between long-existing silos and cooperate across borders.

Thank you for your attention to these words.

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