



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 April 2023

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

Eighteenth meeting

Geneva, 19–21 June 2023

Item 8(a) of the provisional agenda

**Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels:
source-to-sea management**

Key outcomes of the Global workshop on source-to-sea management

Prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with the lead Parties

Summary

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes programme of work for 2022–2024 (ECE/MP.WAT/63/Add.1) includes, in programme area 3.1 on promoting integrated water resources management in transboundary basins, the organization of a global workshop to share good practices related to the source-to-sea approach, under the co-leadership of Estonia and Slovenia.

The Global workshop on source-to-sea management was organized in Geneva and online, from 14 to 16 December 2022, under the leadership of Estonia and Slovenia, and in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Stockholm International Water Institute, the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management, Global Water Partnership and the Global Environment Facility and its International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network.

The Working Group is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the present document;
- (b) Discuss follow-up action, such as the possible preparation of recommendations or a guidance note on source-to-sea management.



I. Key outcomes of the Global workshop on source-to-sea management

The Global workshop on source-to-sea management brought together more than 300 participants (in-person and online) and provided a space for practical learning on effective source-to-sea management.¹

The key outcomes of the discussions, as developed with partners and consulted on with participants, are summarized as follows:

A. Transboundary and intersectoral cooperation should be strengthened

1. Transboundary cooperation on planning and management for shared river basins, as well as coastal zones, should be strengthened and consolidated to respond to all the challenges “from source to sea”, which include institutional fragmentation, lack of capacity, incoherent policy frameworks, etc.
2. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) has the protection of the marine environment among its objectives, as outlined in its articles 2 (6) as well as 9 (3) and (4). It calls for cooperation between freshwater and marine joint bodies to harmonize their work and to prevent, control and reduce the transboundary impact; and includes the precautionary principle and the “polluter pays” principle. However, more activities are needed on source-to-sea management under the Convention, such as building capacity, exchanging experience and developing guidance.
3. Regional seas conventions, with their land-based sources protocols, and other agreements for the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems are important frameworks to work with.
4. A holistic approach is necessary to break down institutional and legislative silos and to coordinate across sectors and national borders – a cornerstone of transboundary water management and the Water Convention. Making use of existing spatial planning frameworks at land and at sea and connecting them is a good starting point. It is necessary to reinforce the coordination of decision-makers and researchers in the implementation of public policies, and to establish or strengthen coordinating mechanisms that cross the traditional land-freshwater-coastal and marine boundaries. Policy and institutional fragmentation at the national level can be overcome through joint policies, action plans or vision documents that address water management and marine resources. Their implementation and enforcement can bring together the relevant institutions to achieve joint objectives and strengthen coordination across sectors, stakeholders and geographic areas. At the transboundary level, source-to-sea aspects can be integrated into river basin management planning and coastal zone management plans.
5. Institutional fragmentation at the transboundary level can be overcome by basin organizations and other joint bodies working together with regional seas conventions, by setting joint objectives, cooperating, and jointly implementing activities and plans (see, e.g., the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, the Benguela Current Commission – the Orange-Senqu River Commission, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River – the Black Sea Commission). Coordination with sub-basin commissions, for example, in terms of pollution load reporting, is also needed. Source-to-sea challenges that arise from alterations to key flows such as water, biota, sediment, pollution, materials and ecosystem services, are some of the areas for potential cooperation between joint bodies and regional seas conventions that can be supported through data and information exchange, harmonization of surveys and standardization of monitoring practices. Cooperation for the protection of the marine environment and the source-to-sea approach may need to be better reflected in the mandates of joint bodies, and their action plans and additional mechanisms

¹ Documents and presentations from the meeting are available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/global-workshop-source-sea-management>.

for cooperation, considering that the interests of all sides may need to be discussed. Mapping of pollution pathways from source-to-sea can improve the understanding of common goals and support the prioritization of actions to fight pollution at the local, regional and global scale.

6. Additional efforts are needed in finding synergies between integrated water resources management, integrated coastal zone management and marine spatial planning, in order to ensure the more sustainable development of coastal areas, as well as the protection and restoration of coastal wetland areas.

7. For effective collaboration on source-to-sea issues at the transboundary level, it is crucial to highlight the benefits of involvement for upstream countries. Ecosystem protection or restoration can play such a role, as benefits from this can transfer upstream. Protecting wetlands and other ecosystems is important for source-to-sea management.

B. More awareness and capacity-building are needed

8. There is a need to increase awareness and involve communities and youth in source-to-sea management. This requires simplifying terms and messages (e.g., “plastic pollution”, “clean beaches”, saving local fish species) and using creative approaches.

9. More work needs to be done to improve understanding of the different flows of large-scale transboundary river systems to large marine ecosystems and oceans.

10. It is critical to understand and identify clear management objectives for connected flows from land to sea and to prioritize actions that can deliver positive outcomes.

11. It is important to demonstrate the economic, environmental and social benefits of applying the source-to-sea approach.

12. There are already good examples of local, bilateral and multi-country projects, with public and private partners, but it is necessary to accelerate actions on the ground and to scale up successful solutions.

C. Financing of source-to-sea action should be incentivized

13. Financial institutions are slowly starting to consider source-to sea issues in their investments, but many more incentives are needed.

14. The inclusion of the source-to-sea approach in transboundary diagnostic analysis and strategic action programmes in Global Environmental Facility projects is a positive incentive for wider uptake of the approach in transboundary basins.

15. Transboundary waters can be considered as global public goods, and investment in preserving public goods can be harnessed for source-to-sea action.

16. The private sector also needs to be involved; blended finance is important.

17. Practical tools exist such as the new European Union taxonomy on sustainable finance² and the Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosure.

D. There is momentum and urgency to accelerate source-to-sea action

18. Freshwater and ocean pollution in different regions put at risk the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals.

19. The 2023 United Nations Water Conference (New York, 22–24 March 2023), which followed the Fourth United Nations Ocean Conference (Lisbon, 27 June–1 July 2022), provided an important opportunity to bolster political ambition and commitment, for

² See [EU Taxonomy classification and reporting in 2023](#).

example, through the Water Action Agenda, which includes several commitments on accelerating source-to-sea action.

20. Climate change can be a motivator for developing mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination and upstream-downstream cooperation.

21. Source-to-sea challenges can only be solved through collective action. It is essential to bring together all stakeholders.

22. Capacity-building is very important and is needed at all levels of government. The private sector needs to be involved in financing measures. Public sector finance can trigger private sector investment.

23. With the currently ongoing negotiations on a global plastics treaty and strong legislative measures such as plastic bans in some countries, there is momentum to build upon. However, other forms of pollution, such as diffuse/nutrient pollution, industrial and mining pollution, microplastics and proliferation of toxic chemicals, also need to be considered and addressed.

24. In some contexts, closing the gaps in access to drinking water and sanitation and the introduction of basic solid waste management and wastewater treatment would greatly improve the situation.

25. Possible future work under the Water Convention includes cooperation with the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management, development of tools, principles and guidance, as well as capacity-building.

II. Proposed next steps

26. The Water Convention aims at protecting the environment of transboundary waters, as well as the marine environment influenced by them, as stated in its articles 2 (6), 9 (3) and (4). As highlighted at the workshop, the Convention can therefore serve as a platform for building capacity, exchanging experience and providing guidance on source-to-sea management.

27. Building on the outcomes of the workshop, possible follow-up action could include the preparation of a guidance note on the implementation of the source-to-sea approach. Such a document would provide background materials, hands-on case studies and step-by-step support for implementation of the source-to-sea approach. The guidance note would be developed in cooperation with partners and tailored to the needs of professionals working in the respective areas.
