



SDG14 requires urgent action from source to sea

An open letter calling on leaders across sectors, organizations, and nations to take coordinated action from source to sea to protect and restore ocean health.

The air we breathe, the food we eat and the climate on which our survival depends all rely on a healthy ocean. The ocean supports entire communities and industries, sustains hundreds of millions of jobs and helps drive the modern global economy. The ocean is the source of life and a treasure trove for biodiversity. But we are in the midst of an environmental crisis that puts the ocean in great peril.

In recognition of this crisis, Sustainable Development Goal 14 was created as part of the 2030 Agenda – calling for urgent action to preserve all life below water. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires holistic thinking, action and planning, balancing the needs of one SDG against the impacts on another. This is especially true for SDG 14, as most of the threats to – and opportunities for – ocean health originate from activities on land.

Tracing impacts on the ocean across landscapes and back to their source is central to tackling global development aspirations at a system scale. Managing from source to sea balances upstream and downstream demands and provides an avenue for coordination across all SDGs.

Functioning circular economies are yet to be fully developed. In the meantime, societies continue to generate pollutant flows with a cascade of impacts on terrestrial and water-related ecosystems extending to coastal zones and the ocean. Enormous amounts of human and agricultural waste, wastewater and runoff wash into rivers and wetlands and from there into the ocean. Oceans become more acidic due to increased absorption of carbon dioxide, threatening the growth of calcifying organisms and entire food chains. History also demonstrates our limited capacity to safeguard the flows of water, sediment and biota needed to sustain ecosystem function along rivers and at the coast, with devastating impacts on freshwater and marine biodiversity as a result. With a growing global population, increasing

consumption and accelerating urbanization, these pressures build towards a breaking point, where no-one will remain untouched. Whether directly depending on the ocean, or living inland, we all need healthy oceans.

All sectors of society must understand and take responsibility for their impact on the ocean, whether it is through runoff from agriculture, untreated wastewater from industrial and domestic uses, inadequate solid waste management, extensive water diversion, sediment trapping in reservoirs, wetland drainage or habitat fragmentation as a result of encroachment. We cannot afford wasting time and must act now. The Covid-19 pandemic reminds us we need to strengthen our resilience to future shocks. At the same time, recovery from Covid-19 offers us the opportunity to rethink the way we manage, govern, finance and consume.

Holistic, inclusive and sustainable planning and action is the way forward. With the world planning its largest recovery efforts ever, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change course and start the blue-green revolution; creating jobs for the future, not returning to the status quo. Now is the time for decision-makers around the world to drive meaningful change through policy reforms, sustainable financing and collaborative management that restore and maintain the health of the ocean. Catalytic examples will incorporate nature-based solutions and support innovative blue-green options, over yesterday's fossil fuel-dependent ones.

As signatories of this Open Letter, we call upon decision-makers and citizens to join forces to protect the ocean, from source to sea, and encourage the international community to:

COMMIT | Mobilize commitments from leaders in government, business, financial institutions, academia, and civil society to advance coordinated management from source to sea. Rally support for the development of legal instruments, strategies, and action plans to catalyze source-to-sea action at global, regional, national, and local levels.

FINANCE | Incentivize management practices that link land-based activities with impacts on coasts and ocean. Call for collaboration from international financial institutions and governments to stimulate cross-sectoral coordination and upstream-downstream cooperation through financial and regulatory tools.

PARTNER | Build and reinforce multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels to strengthen commitment and advance knowledge. Accelerate action toward development on land and along rivers that safeguards healthy marine and coastal ecosystems and protects livelihoods dependent upon ecosystem services.

ACT | Mainstream source-to-sea system thinking in governance and management frameworks to strengthen coordination between actors. Address linkages between terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine systems in the design and implementation of actions in cities, industries and landscapes, along rivers and coasts, and at sea.

ENGAGE | Move towards sustainable consumption and production by encouraging consumers and businesses to transition away from the make-take-waste economy towards circularity and adopt behaviours and practices that contribute to the long-term health of ecosystems in the source-to-sea continuum.

RECOVER | Invest in and enable Covid-19 recovery plans that balance inland development with ocean impacts, biodiversity loss and the global climate threat. Recovery must be holistic, supporting every part of the economy and ecosystem equally. Development actions must be weighed across landscapes and against both social and environmental benefits.



We, the undersigned, commit to working tirelessly to reduce our own negative impact on ocean health and we encourage others to do the same. It is our shared responsibility to save the ocean before it is too late.

Signatories:

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