

8th Annual Subcommittee meeting of the CPR to UNEP

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EU+MS proposal for a UNEA-5 resolution on accelerated adaptation measures to secure water quality and strengthened climate resilience in aquatic ecosystems

Concept Note

Climate change will result in significant impacts on our water resources as well as on freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. Some of the effects have long been visible to us. It is a matter of urgency that sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems should be a central element in the adaptation strategy of any country and in cross-border cooperation at river basin and at regional seas shared by different countries. As both water and climate change do not respect borders, it creates an international dimension to climate change adaptation.

A specific challenge for integrated water resources management is connected to the fact that almost half of the world's total land surface is drained by international river basins. Additionally, vast groundwater resources are also transboundary. These transboundary waters create mostly hydrological and environmental but also social and economic interdependencies between countries. Integrated water resources management and measures have large added benefits also in coastal areas through improved water quality, healthy marine habitats and thereby improved living conditions and reproduction for marine species, not at least fish production, protection of marine habitats from degradation and blue carbon sequestration.

It's a fact that the main environmental problems in freshwater and marine ecosystems are well known and so are many of the solutions. The problem is the lack of implementation. The proposed resolution therefore focuses on initiating concrete measures to strengthen cross-border or regional cooperation as appropriate to address climate change impacts such as droughts and floods and also to reduce pollution and degradation of freshwater ecosystems, as well as reducing nutrient and other forms of coastal and marine pollution and degradation. The aim is to have a very clear action-oriented goal and deadline and to implement the solutions that already exist that can help to address impacts that are already happening and/or that are anticipated.

The proposal stays at the heart of the main headline of UNEA 5 "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" and would sign in Action area 1. Nature for Poverty Eradication, Jobs and Economic Prosperity, 3. Nature for Climate and 4. Nature for sustainable food ecosystems. The resolution aims to deliver in particular on SDG 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all and SDG 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development as well as SDG 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. This resolution complements and synergizes with the resolution proposed by the European Union and its Member States on Nature based solutions.

The previous UNEAs adopted a number of resolutions related to the proposed resolution topic including: 2/24 on Desertification, 3/10 on Water pollution and freshwater ecosystems, 4/1 on Sustainable consumption and production, 4/6 on Marine Litter, 4/7 on Waste management, 4/8 on Chemicals and Waste. The resolution will build also on the UN Secretary-General's Decade of Action for the SDGs as well as UNEP's role and its services on marine litter, nutrient management and wastewater.

UNEA-5 should build on these previous resolutions and agreements and this resolution aims to focus on the need for consistent actions and measures to ensure that pollution of freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems is reduced and their services secured as a prerequisite for climate change adaptation.

The Ocean is the major part of our world and UNEP is well placed to drive and facilitate the implementation of solutions as facilitator and coordinator between countries in regional seas through RSCs, financing bodies and technical expertise, also in line with UNEP's Marine and Coastal strategy. Activities have to be coordinated with the work of other organisations and MEAs in this field to join forces and resources and ensure aligned assistance to the needs of Member States.

Steps should be taken at, national, regional or international level, depending on which level is the most appropriate. Given the specificities of marine areas and freshwater ecosystems, joint action can serve to accelerate adaptation efforts and thus strengthen climate resilience, providing mutual benefits to the Parties involved. Existing bodies, platforms and agreements should be used in the most effective way.

The resolution encourages Member States to enhance cross-border or regional cooperation to address climate change impacts and to reduce pollution in aquatic ecosystems. In this respect UNEP can play an important facilitating role in coordination with other UN bodies and relevant international organizations. UNEP can also play a strong role to facilitate a post-COVID 19 green recovery that accelerates implementation of known solutions that contribute to jobs, reduced negative impacts on and strengthened climate resilience in aquatic ecosystems. Post-COVID 19 green recovery could have multiple benefits if invested in sustainable water and ocean adaptation measures with positive outcomes for the social, economic and environmental dimension.

Proposed outline for the resolution

Preambular paragraphs focus on:

- Need for climate adaptation due to the severe impacts that climate change will have on aquatic ecosystems as well as on freshwater resource management;
- Regional cooperation in river basins and sea areas, using existing bodies and agreements;
- Freshwater and marine management to prevent droughts, floods and pollution;
- Restoration of blue ecosystems, including carbon sinks;
- 2030 Agenda achievements, in particular SDG 6 and 14
- 2023 UN Conference on Water as an opportunity to review the implementation of the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018-2028";
- Mentioning of Paris Agreement including links to relevant adaptation strategies;
- Post Covid 19 green recovery (build back better);
- Source to Sea approach connecting river basin management to Coastal/regional seas including integrated water resources management.

Operative paragraphs focus on:

- Member states to ensure coordination of climate change adaptation strategies and plans and water management plans;
 - Member states to develop flood, drought and water scarcity plans;
 - Member states to improve wastewater treatment, waste management and agricultural practices to reduce pollution of all kinds including emissions of hazardous substances and nutrients to freshwater, coastal and marine water;
 - Member states to develop joint further regional commitments in i.a. the context of transboundary basin cooperation, Regional Sea Conventions (RSC), to address relevant issues of SDG 6 and 14 measures to secure water quality and strengthened climate resilience in aquatic ecosystems including the need for climate adaptation, to be presented at UNEA-6;
 - UNEP to support regional work to develop joint commitments, where needed.
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