

European Green Week



Towards a water resilient Europe
#WaterWiseEU

Brussels
29/30 May 2024



Charlemagne building, Gasperi room

Available interpretation: English, French, German, Spanish

Wednesday, 29 May 2024

12.30 **Registration opens**, welcome coffee

13.45 **Opening of the conference**, Katrina Sichel, Master of Ceremonies

14.00 **Augmented Magic Dance Show by Moulla Magic and Arthur Cadre**; concept by Filippo Ferraresi

Welcome by Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director General of DG Environment, European Commission

Keynote speech: Maroš Šefčovič, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for the European Green Deal

Launch of the water campaign

14.30 **Opening session: Water resilient EU - key challenges, definition and vision**

We rely on water for all human activity. All the time, everywhere – of the right quality and in sufficient quantity. All sectors and industries, from energy production, public health and inland navigation to agriculture and productive industries, depend on it. So do all ecosystems. And we in turn depend on these natural ecosystems and their services, for healthy and prosperous lives and a sustained industrial economic base. But this indispensable resource – water – is under increasing pressure from global warming, biodiversity loss, pollution, overconsumption, structural mismanagement, unsustainable land use, and all-round human influence.

The consequences are painfully visible. More frequent or prolonged droughts, more extreme precipitation and floods, and serious threats to water-related ecosystems are causing considerable damage to our society and economy, public health and pose risks to social peace and stability.

The EU already has a robust set of laws in place to manage water sustainably, many of which have been updated in the recent past. Despite these improvements, water stress has become so alarming that industry and policy makers at all levels are now urgently considering what new courses of action are needed to make the EU more water-resilient and better equipped to adapt to current and future water challenges, while leaving no-one behind.

Speakers in the opening session of Green Week 2024 will share their perspectives and reflect on how to ensure that a burgeoning public discussion on water leads to effective action and a systemic shift in our approach to water - away from responding in a crisis mode towards a proactive management of risks in a water resilient Europe.

Speakers:

- **Alain Maron**, Brussels Minister for Climate Transition, the Environment, Energy, Social Action and Health
 - **Anikó Ráisz**, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs and Circular Economy, Hungary
 - **Pietro Francesco de Lotto**, President of the Consultative Commission of Industrial Change (CCMI), European Economic and Social Committee
 - **Lidia Brito**, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences
- Moderator: Veronica Manfredi**, Director for Zero Pollution and Green Cities, DG Environment, European Commission

15.30 Statement by Ruslan Strilets, Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine

15.35 From a growing global crisis to a global opportunity

Security and water resilience go hand in hand and are global as well as local challenges. Amidst an increasingly difficult environmental and geopolitical context, there is a need to give impetus to the global water resilience agenda. Against this backdrop, 2023 saw the first UN Water Conference in a generation. This session takes stock of where we are one year later.

The panellists will also discuss water-related threats to peace and security posed by climate change and environmental degradation as outlined in the EU Communication [A new outlook on the climate and security nexus](#). Special focus will be on the interlinkages between environmental crises, increased competition for natural resources and the risk of conflict. The role of inclusive water management as a tool to reduce tensions is also addressed.

Speakers:

- **Stuart Orr**, Global Freshwater Leader, World Wildlife Foundation (WWF)
 - **Claire McAllister**, Head of Major Initiatives, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)
 - **Henk WJ Ovink**, Executive Director, Global Commission on the Economics of Water
 - **Veronika Hunt Safrankova**, Head of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Brussels
- Moderator: Tony Agotha**, EEAS Special Envoy for Climate and the Environment

16.35 Coffee break

16.55 – 17.55 **Water – finding cooperative solutions across borders**

In this discussion, we will dive deeper into practical examples of water cooperation in Europe and around the world. The EU has a long tradition of transboundary water and marine cooperation, with 55% of the EU river basin districts being cross-border. Experience shows that successful cooperation is possible and can benefit all parties concerned. At the same time, with accelerating climate change and environmental degradation, new challenges emerge, such as:

- addressing the interlinkage between environmental crises, which increase competition for natural resources, notably water, and the risk of conflicts
- finding water and land management solutions that can increase local resilience capacities, and mitigate social and political tensions in the green transition

This session will explore possible responses to these challenges.

Speakers:

- **Francesca Bernardini**, *Head of the Transboundary Cooperation Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)*
- **Miriam Haritz**, *President of the International Convention for the Protection of the Rhine and ‘Water Director’ in the German BMUV*
- **Edouard Boinet**, *Head of Project, International Network of Basin Organisations Europe*
- **Mitja Bricelj**, *Member to the ICPDR, Sava Commission and Barcelona Convention, Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning*

Moderator: **Claudia Fusco**, *Director for General Affairs, Knowledge & Resources, DG Environment, European Commission*

- 18.30 Natura 2000 Awards with Maroš Šefčovič**, *Executive Vice-President of the European Commission* and **Florika Fink-Hooijer**, *Director General of DG Environment*

08.00 *Welcome coffee*

09.00 **Welcome to the second day of the conference, Katrina Sichel**

09.10 **Restoring and protecting a broken water cycle**

Nature and biodiversity depend on water. The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Law address links between biodiversity, climate and water. Climate change accelerates the destruction of the natural world through more droughts, flooding, and wildfires, while the loss and unsustainable use of ecosystem services are, in turn, key drivers of climate change and water stress.

But just as the crises are linked, so are the solutions. Nature is a vital ally in building a water resilient European Union. Nature-based solutions based in healthy and resilient ecosystems can help to solve key water challenges, such as absorbing extreme precipitation through healthy soils, protecting coastlines against storm surges, preventing topsoil erosion during extreme weather events, stabilising slopes in mountain areas, cooling cities during heat waves, or providing ample amounts of clean, cool water during dry summer periods.

Speakers:

- **Prof. Peter Strohschneider**, *Chairman of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture*
- **João Madeira**, *Strategic Council of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park*
- **Eduardo Murillo Peñacoba**, *Project Manager, LIFE Ebro Resilience*
- **Elias Verbanck**, *Project Manager, LIFE SPARC (Space for Adapting the River Scheldt to Climate Change, Belgium)*

Moderator: Humberto Delgado Rosa, *Director for Biodiversity, DG Environment, European Commission*

10.15 **Riverside chat: See water differently through the lens of landscape architect with John Boon**, *International Federation of Landscape Architects Europe*

Host: Patrick Child, *Deputy Director General, DG Environment, European Commission*

10.45 *Coffee break*

11.30 **Cascading water - creating a water-smart EU economy**

Water is a public good that is an essential input for businesses, whilst also being a human right and an intrinsic part of our environment. Food and energy production as well as most manufacturing are intense consumers of water, and the ongoing green and digital transitions come with significant water bills attached. But such competing demands from different economic sectors, from households as well as from ecosystems can negatively impact the competitiveness and strategic autonomy of the EU economy.

A water-smart economy offers to reconcile the different water needs of a society, while preserving the environment and increasing our resilience and ability to withstand future water challenges. The Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus (WEFE Nexus) approach allows to identify win-win solutions and transparently frame trade-offs between the protection of water and ecosystems and the supply of sufficient food, energy and raw materials.

A water-smart economy operates on principles of the circular economy throughout the water cycle. As with other natural resources, water should be used optimally – applying the “water efficiency first principle” - should be retained and kept in functional use for as long as possible – the “cascading principle”, then reused or recycled (i.e. with treatment) when it becomes wastewater. Desalination can also be part of the solution, when done sustainably. All these areas have huge innovation potential.

This session discusses how to put the EU on a path to a water-smart economy. What are the priorities, choices and trade-offs? What are the low-hanging fruits, and how do we establish and pursue the long-term vision as a society?

Speakers:

- **Prof. Dragan Savic**, *Chief Executive Officer, KWR Water Research Institute*
 - **Emil Fannikke Kiær**, *Deputy Director General, Confederation of Danish Industries*
 - **Dr. Geoff Townsend**, *Industry Fellow, Ecolab*
 - **John Bell**, *Director for Healthy Planet, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission*
- Moderator: Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea**, *Director for Circular Economy, DG Environment, European Commission*

12.30 Riverside chat: Recognising legal rights of water ecosystems with **Teresa Vicente**, *professor of philosophy of law and 2024 Goldman Environmental Prize winner*

Host: Beatriz Rios, *European reporter & broadcast journalist*

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 The very source of wellbeing: clean, affordable water and sanitation for all

Ensuring access to clean water and sanitation is one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG6). While substantial progress has been made in increasing access to clean drinking water and sanitation, billions of people—mostly in rural areas—still lack these basic services.

Also in the EU, millions of citizens still don't have access to sufficient and clean water. In 2017, the Commission estimated that 23 million people or 4.5 % of the total EU population were not connected to public water supply. This affects some Member States more than others.

To remediate this situation, the EU has recently modernised its Drinking Water Directive and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, which now include explicit provisions to ensure better access to water, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised groups. This raises questions on financing and investment in water service and how to enable cost-recovery in the water price whilst ensuring affordability and rentability of water services.

Speakers:

- **Par Dalhielm**, *EurEau President & Svenskt Vatten*
- **Anna Dupont**, *Senior Policy Analyst, OECD and Global Commission on the Economics of Water*
- **Alexa Dembek**, *Chief Technology and Sustainability Officer, DuPont*
- **Joško Klisović**, *President of the Zagreb City Assembly, Member of the Committee of the Regions*

- **Catarina de Albuquerque**, *Chief Executive Officer, Sanitation and Water for All* (online)

Moderator: **Carla Montesi**, *Director for Green Deal & Digital Agenda, DG for International Partnerships, European Commission*

15.35 – 16.45 **Governance and implementation**

The EU has a robust rules book in place to protect water and aquatic ecosystems. If those rules were respected in full, the current crisis would be less pressing. In reality, however, we face a significant gap between the agreed policy and its practical implementation and enforcement. Some of these gaps can be explained by years of underinvestment. The current annual investment in water measures (by the EU, EIB and national budgets) reaches EUR 63 billion. Yet, an estimated investment gap of EUR 24 billion remains annually.

Without significant additional public and private investments, progress will be too slow and too little. At the same time, making sure that other subsidies do not drive us backwards is equally important, as environmentally harmful subsidies can promote inefficient use of water, including by providing fiscal encouragement for pollution. We need to become better at applying the ‘Polluter Pays’ and the ‘Do No Significant Harm’ principles also in the national budgets. Finally, public investment will not be sufficient to fill the investment gap. Private finance will need to step in. How can we ensure that implementation and investments are accelerated so that they match the scale and pace of the emerging water crisis?

Speakers:

- **Dr. André Weidenhaupt**, *Director General, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity of Luxembourg; Chair of the Management Board of the European Environment Agency (EEA)*
- **Andreia Liborio Franco**, *Portuguese Environment Agency, Water Resources Department, Senior Officer, Water Resources Expert*
- **Marco Falconi**, *chair of the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL)*
- **Marco Beroš**, *Lead Engineer, Water Management Division, Projects Directorate, European Investment Bank*
- **Ester Asin Martinez**, *Director, WWF European Policy Office, Brussels*

Moderator: **Paul Speight**, *acting Director of Compliance, Governance & Support to Member States Directorate, DG Environment, European Commission*

16.50 – 17.00 **Closing remarks by Florika Fink-Hooijer**, *Director General of DG Environment, European Commission*

17.30 **LIFE Awards ceremony**

Opening speech and hand out of the awards for nature, circular economy and water: **Florika Fink-Hooijer**, *Director General of DG Environment, European Commission*

Closing speech and hand out of the award for climate: **Kurt Vandenberghe**, *Director General of DG Climate Action, European Commission*