



European Economic
and Social Committee



CALL FOR AN

EU Blue Deal

Event highlights
26 October 2023

#EUBlueDeal



Foreword

On 26 October 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted its call for a new and comprehensive water strategy for Europe – an EU Blue Deal.

While, in 2010, the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to water and sanitation, globally around 2.2 billion people still lack access to safely managed drinking water. Water stress is a major and growing concern also in Europe. 60% of European cities have experienced water scarcity, and it is projected that water scarcity will increase by 35% by 2070 if no action is taken. Without action, water poverty will concern ever larger parts of civil societies around the world, with far-reaching implications for economic, social, and political stability.

Given the current and future water challenges facing the world and our continent, the EESC, as the voice of Europe's organised civil society, strongly believes that Europe needs an ambitious, comprehensive and forward-looking common approach to water policies. A change of scale is needed at EU level. This is why the EESC has called on the other institutions to adopt an EU Blue Deal as a key priority for the next legislative mandate, on a par with the EU Green Deal.

This work was presented at the EESC Plenary session and the high-level conference "Call for an EU Blue Deal" on 26 October 2023. The aim of the EESC's call was to establish water as one of the strategic priorities for the European Union in the next years to come. The event provided an opportunity to exchange with representatives of EU and international institutions, top-level water experts and key stakeholders on the need for a new approach to water policies at European level. The conference was structured around three panels to address the following thematic:

- Securing access to water and resilient water infrastructures
- Sustainable consumption of water and fostering new opportunities
- Blue Deal financing and Blue Diplomacy

The EESC is committed to monitoring the take-up of the Blue Deal proposals together with organised civil society organisations and all relevant institutions in the months and years to come to make sure that the EU delivers on this topic, which is of vital importance to the future of our society.

More information on the Blue Deal can be found online at www.eesc.europa.eu/eubluedeaal

PROGRAMME – 26 October 2023

EESC Plenary Institutional debate on the Blue Deal

10:45 – 12:00 High level debate on a Call for an EU Blue Deal – a comprehensive water strategy for Europe and the President's Declaration on the EU Blue Deal

- Introduction by **Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC
- Statement by **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries (video message)
- Statement by **Pernille Weiss**, Chair of the MEP Water Group, Member of the European Parliament
- Statement by **Pedro Arrojo-Agudo**, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation
- Statement by **Prof Mariana Mazzucato**, Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water and Professor at University College London, Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose
- Statement by **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, President of CCMI
- Presentation of the CCMI/209 own-initiative opinion by the rapporteurs "A Call for an EU Blue Deal": **Paul Rübiger**, **Florian Marin**, **Kinga Joó** and co-rapporteur **Péter Olajos**
- Presentation of the President's Declaration and conclusion by **Oliver Röpke**

EESC high-level conference: "Call for an EU Blue Deal"

Moderator: Chris Burns and visual facilitator: Kristof Braekeleire

12:00 – 12:05 Opening of high-level conference "Why a call for an EU Blue Deal"

- Introduction by **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, President of CCMI
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12:05 – 13:00 Panel 1: Securing access to water and resilient water infrastructures

Introductory remarks: Kinga Joó, Member of the EESC and rapporteur on the Blue Deal

Speakers:

- **Pedro Arrojo-Agudo**, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation
 - **Hasmik Barseghyan**, President of European Youth Parliament for Water
 - **Bernard Van Nuffel**, President of Aqua Publica Europea
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13:00 – 14:15 Lunch break



**14:15 – 14:30 Presentation of film “Until the last drop”
by documentary filmmaker Ewa Ewart**

**14:30 – 15:30 Panel 2: Sustainable consumption of water
and fostering new opportunities**

Introductory remarks: **Monika Sitarova**, Co-President of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) of the EESC

Speakers:

- **Lifeng Li**, Director of the Land and Water Division (NSL), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) (speaking remotely)
 - **Geoff Townsend**, Water Vision Leadership Team Leader, Water Smart Industries, Water Europe
 - **Michele Falcone**, Chair of SGI Europe Water Task Force
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15:30 – 16:30 Panel 3: Blue Deal financing and Blue Diplomacy

Introductory remarks: **Milena Angelova**, Member of the EESC and rapporteur on the Blue Deal

Speakers:

- **Almotaz Abadi**, Deputy Secretary General for Water, Environment and Blue Economy, Union for the Mediterranean
 - **Phoebe Koundouri**, Professor Athens University of Economics and Business & Technical University of Denmark, President EAERE, Chair SDSN Global Climate Hub, Co-chair SDSN Europe (speaking remotely)
 - **Patricia Calderon**, Global Associate Director for Water, CDP
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16:30 – 16:35 Video message from **Erik Orsenna**, Economist specialised in water resources, member of the French Academy, chairman of Initiatives for the Future of Great Rivers (IFGR)

16:35 – 16:50 Closing

- **Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC



EESC Plenary Institutional Debate: Call for an EU Blue Deal – a comprehensive water strategy for Europe and the presentation of the EESC President’s Declaration for an EU Blue Deal



Oliver Röpke,
President of the EESC

“It is time to join forces and find common solutions to the systemic water crisis.”

President Röpke opened the debate by stressing that the world is facing a water crisis and that it is now time to act. The EESC is calling for a new and comprehensive water strategy for Europe, an EU Blue Deal. Since the launch of this initiative, the EESC has been working closely with a wide range of stakeholders, civil society organisations and EU and international institutions, examining where the EU framework for water should be improved and further strengthened. He highlighted the need to adopt an EU Blue Deal as a standalone strategic policy during the next mandate of the European Commission. He stressed that this was a topic where cooperation is needed, both within Europe and globally.



Virginijus Sinkevičius,
Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

“Thank you to the Committee for putting freshwater management and clean water for all where they belong – in the European spotlight.”

In his video statement, Commissioner Sinkevičius highlighted the central role of water at the heart of the triple planetary crisis caused by climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. He mentioned the need for a systemic transformation of the way water is managed, used and valued, while bearing in mind the need to protect natural ecosystems. The Commission has announced a Water Resilience Initiative as a key priority for 2024. Improving water efficiency, countering leakages, increasing water reuse and reducing over-abstraction, as well as tackling pollution and the protection of nature are some key areas that need attention. Industry, energy, transport and agriculture need to improve water efficiency and integrate water protection to their business models. He also mentioned the need to respect in practice the human right of access to drinking water and sanitation. He concluded by noting that the EESC and its members are important strategic partners in this agenda.



Pernille Weiss,
Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the MEP Water Group

“True water resilience must become our priority in the EU. The European Parliament fully supports the creation of a Blue Deal – it is exactly what we need: a holistic, structured, evidence-based approach to our precious water resources.”

MEP Weiss stated that water is the most important topic to be tackled in the next EU legislative period. She confirmed her full support to the EU Blue Deal and mentioned the joint letter co-signed by the EESC and 36 MEPs, which had been sent to EU Heads of State and Government, calling on them to adopt and support an EU Blue Deal. Ms Weiss called for a holistic approach to water and underlined the need to stop working in silos. She also stressed the need to tackle issues linking water, critical raw materials, industry, agriculture and the energy sector: there will be no green without blue. Establishing an EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community on water as soon as possible would strengthen collaboration with businesses, education and research in this area. She expressed her hope that the 27 EU countries could work together and learn from each other to make a better world for future generations.



Pedro Arrojo-Agudo,
UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation

“Technology will not solve the injustices or lack of sustainability in our society if we do not first guarantee democratic governance of water based on a sustainable approach and on human rights, understanding water as a common good and not as a commodity.”

Mr Arrojo-Agudo welcomed the EESC’s EU Blue Deal initiative. He spoke about the need to make peace with our rivers and aquatic ecosystems, noting that the EU offers remarkable global leadership with the Water Framework Directive. However, key challenges remain, such as applying the directive to all EU policies that have strong links with water management, such as agriculture. He therefore considered it important that the European Commission treat the issue as a political priority. Referring to the Right2Water Citizens’ Initiative and the reform of the Drinking Water Directive in 2020, he noted the need to address the democratic governance of water and human rights: it is essential to understand water as a common good and to treat water and sanitation services as public services of general interest that have to be universally accessible. Finally, he underlined the importance of working on the ground to guarantee the active participation of social movements and people who are fighting for water and human rights, with women at the forefront.





Prof. Mariana Mazzucato,
Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water and
Professor at University College London, Founding Director of the UCL
Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose

“If we continue to ignore the world’s water crisis, we will not tackle climate change, nor will we make any meaningful progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

Professor Mazzucato noted that instead of trying to fix market failures with policies, we need to change the underlying economics by co-creating an economy that delivers for people and the planet. Truly treating water as a common good means seeing it as an objective that is treated urgently, collectively and systemically, as well as inspirationally. The economics approach to a common good should include purpose, co-creation and participation, involving the most affected communities. Referring to the Moon landing as an example, Professor Mazzucato underlined the need for a mission-oriented approach involving many different sectors. She spoke about the need to redesign land use and property rights, permits and contracts, as well as the social concepts that underpinned them. Public-private partnerships should be changed into just water partnerships. Finally, she highlighted the need for specific, long-term financing to address the global cross-sectoral and cross-actor water problems.



Pietro Francesco De Lotto,
President of the CCMI

“We are convinced and determined, and we urge the other institutions to adopt a real, comprehensive policy for water. Water has to be included in all European policies.”

Pietro De Lotto stressed the need to overcome the fragmented water-policy landscape at EU and national level. He noted that only a few countries in the EU have a national water strategy. Water is a very complex issue, but the Blue Deal approach aims to combine a variety of different interests: citizens, farmers, consumers, the environment, businesses and workers; all of them needed to work together to obtain results. Mr De Lotto thanked MEP Weiss for the joint work on the Blue Deal, seeking to convince not only the European Commission but also national governments. He closed by stating that now is the time to continue this work, based on the political principles and key actions presented in the EESC’s Declaration.



Rapporteur Paul Rübiger thanked all those involved in setting the agenda for the Blue Deal and contributing to the work. He noted that water is indeed a common, life-giving good that does not belong to any one person or entity. Water management should be based on the cascading use of water, and a circular economy could bring benefits for us all. He noted that the Blue Deal was based on the idea of a water-smart society. He concluded by saying that the EU needs a commissioner for water, in the same way as we have had one for energy, and that the EIT should launch a water knowledge innovation community as soon as possible.

Rapporteur Florian Marin highlighted water's importance for peace and solidarity, and its role as a common good which can not be traded on the single market. He stressed our joint responsibility to conserve water, as every living being depends on it. He noted that water should be a strategic priority in the next EU programming period and mentioned the need for specific transparent prices for vulnerable groups, water conditionalities and a common definition of water poverty. He spoke about the need to ensure fair access to water for all, including industry, whilst protecting the competitiveness of EU industries and putting human and biodiversity needs before profits. He concluded that the time has come for a comprehensive approach and an EU Blue Deal.

Rapporteur Kinga Joó spoke about the EESC's aim to treat water with an overarching approach, integrating different perspectives. She stressed that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is not a privilege, but an internationally-acknowledged fundamental right. Yet some communities, particularly vulnerable social groups, continue to struggle with water poverty in the EU. The EU Blue Deal has the potential to play a significant role in mitigating disparities in access to clean water and sanitation throughout Europe. She mentioned affordability and fair water prices and the need for targeted investment to ensure universal access and highlighted the importance of both infrastructure development and social development policies in this regard.

Co-rapporteur Péter Olajos said that the principles and recommendations of the Blue Deal Declaration clearly communicate the EESC's proposals on the action that is needed to protect water resources. He mentioned the need for reliable data as a basis for decision-making and the importance of adopting nature-based solutions in addition to technical approaches. He underlined that our resilience depends on our capacity to restore soil water storage capacity, secure afforestation and create green sponge cities. He concluded by thanking all those involved, especially Mr De Lotto for his leadership on the Blue Deal.

At the end of the Plenary debate, **President Röpke** presented the EESC President's **Declaration for an EU Blue Deal**. The Declaration contains 15 principles that should guide future EU initiatives and a set of 21 concrete actions to be implemented as a matter of urgency. The President closed the debate by thanking all the stakeholders and speakers for their support and stating that together we can make sure that water finds a place at the heart of the EU's agenda.

“The next step will be to put our call on the agenda of the EU institutions. We are already working in partnership with the European Parliament and I also count on Member States to join forces.”





High-level conference: Call for an EU Blue Deal

Opening: Introduction by **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, President of CCMI

In his opening statement, Pietro De Lotto underlined the importance of continuing the work together with European institutions as well as all relevant stakeholders and civil society organisations in order to achieve a new and comprehensive policy on water at European level, on a par with the EU Green Deal. He also stressed the need to convince national governments to work together in the same direction.

Panel 1: Securing access to water and resilient water infrastructures

Introductory remarks: Kinga Joó,
Member of the EESC and rapporteur on the Blue Deal

Rapporteur Joó started by outlining her own inspiration for the work on the Blue Deal. The European Pillar of Social Rights explicitly states that everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water and sanitation. Yet, the reality is that a considerable share of the EU population does not have access to these services, with certain minority communities and regions being especially hard hit. For instance, half a million people in the EU do not have access to basic drinking water services, and one in three people in the Roma community do not have access to sanitation services. In terms of reducing disparities in access to clean water in the EU, she highlighted the need for available and reliable data, which is currently missing at EU level, as well as the need for funding for water infrastructure and services. For instance, EU renovation funds could include the water element.



Pedro Arrojo-Agudo,
UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation

“In the EU, we need a formal recognition of human rights when it comes to water and sanitation.”

Mr Arrojo-Agudo started by noting that states and groups of states have a key role to play when it comes to solving water challenges. The EU can help push for water policies at the international level, including the UN, where a global strategy on water is missing. He stated that the EU is uniquely placed to reform its water policies, which would improve the lives of both its citizens and of people around the world. But this requires a true human rights approach to water. He stressed that water should be a tool for peace and not for war or extortion. Leaders need to be aware of the role water plays in conflicts and migration patterns around the world, and water should be treated as part of security policies. He also highlighted the importance of collaborating directly with rightsholders as well as with stakeholders, and called on leaders to protect those fighting for their human rights to water, instead of punishing them. He closed by calling for better inclusion of women, as they often bear heavy responsibilities when it comes to providing water for their communities.





**Hasmik Barseghyan,
President of European Youth Parliament for Water**

“We need a strong European political commitment to achieve the SDG6 beyond Europe, based on the human rights approach to water and sanitation, and fostering the global ambition for human development, climate adaptation and security.”

Welcoming the Blue Deal approach, Ms Barshegyan highlighted water’s transversal role in all sectors. She encouraged leaders to adopt a nexus approach that would help decision makers better understand the interrelatedness and interdependencies of environmental resources and support water resilience. She then stressed the importance of the water-health nexus, which is often overlooked by many decision makers. Using the example of antibiotics in water, she argued that the quality of water treatment and resilience of infrastructures are intimately linked to health, and that a healthy society is an impossibility without clean water. She continued by urging decision makers to value and validate the work of young professionals and treat them as equal partners and collaborators in water action. According to Ms Barshegyan, young people have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of concrete solutions and in holding decision-makers and governments accountable.



**Bernard Van Nuffel,
President of Aqua Publica Europea**

“There is no technological silver bullet to water problems. Adequate solutions can only be found through a democratic, shared, and collective water governance system.”

Mr Van Nuffel started by highlighting the significant need for investment: according to the OECD, around 289 billion euros of additional investments are needed by 2030 to equip the Member States’ water systems, which face many challenges and new regulatory requirements. He continued by noting that in addition to focusing on the quality of water, the question of availability needs to be addressed. Water users, households, industry and agriculture need to take preventative measures to safeguard the existing water resources both by curbing pollution and cutting back on wasteful consumption. He stressed that efficient water management is key to achieving the vision of the proposed EU Blue Deal, but to reduce investment needs and improve water affordability, there is also an urgent need for a strong EU regulatory framework that ensures the reduction of pollution upstream. He underlined that the process of bringing water to consumers must be a collaborative one, with the state ensuring affordability and water operators securing availability, while respecting the principle of water as a human right. Mr van Nuffel called for the polluter pays principle to be the bedrock of water policy.



Presentation of film “Until the last drop” by documentary filmmaker Ewa Ewart

The afternoon session of the conference kicked off with a presentation of the trailer of the award-winning documentary film “Until the Last Drop” by filmmaker Ewa Ewart.

“In Europe, we believe that water problems do not concern us, that they happen in some faraway countries, but this is a serious misconception.”

Taking the floor, Ms Ewart spoke about the inspiration behind her film, which started with an encounter with a river polluted with oil in the Amazon jungle. She then continued by raising the issue of the abysmal quality of some European rivers and the danger they are facing if pollution and consumption habits do not change. For instance, her film tells the story of one of the most toxic rivers in the world, the river Sarno in Italy. She highlighted that the pollution of rivers everywhere is systemic and that the current regulatory frameworks are incapable of limiting it, as companies can choose to pay fines while continuing their polluting operations. She urged decision makers to see the reality on the ground and to engage with activists and local stakeholders who have to face the challenges every day.



Panel 2: Sustainable consumption of water and fostering new opportunities

**Introductory remarks: Monika Sitarova,
Co-President of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)
of the EESC**

Ms Sitarova started by highlighting the cross-cutting nature of water policy and how every single citizen and business as well as agriculture are impacted by water policy. Industries and other water users need to be more aware of their water footprint. She mentioned the importance of including water in the different policy areas at EU level, including industrial policy, as one of the inspirations behind the work on the EU Blue Deal. Presenting the example of a paper mill in Spain which uses recycled water, she stressed the importance of supporting industries in adopting smarter usage of water and the need for investments in research and development in this area. She finished by highlighting the need to create a strong policy framework on water, and to go global with it.





Lifeng Li,
Director of the Land and Water Division (NSL), Food and Agriculture
Organization of the UN (FAO)

“We need to break the current silos and come up with a more connected and comprehensive approach to address water and its social, economic and environmental aspects.”

Director Li welcomed the EU Blue Deal as an inspiring initiative, as it is very much aligned with the work on the FAO on water. He particularly welcomed the proposals concerning data and technologies and argued that information which helps monitor water resources, such as data from remote sensing, should be made available to decision makers and also to farmers to support their daily activities. He called for a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to water, connecting the different sectors and different stakeholders from upstream to downstream. As an example, he mentioned that only a third of National Pathways to sustainable food systems, delivered after the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, address water in a meaningful way. Finally, he spoke about the importance of awareness raising and data as well as collaboration, so that the unseen challenges of the future can be addressed with more preparedness.



Geoff Townsend,
Water Vision Leadership Team Leader, Water Smart Industries, Water Europe

“To understand sustainable water use and how we can better manage water, we need meaningful data. I call on the EU institutions to bring all the data you already have into one place.”

Mr Townsend started by noting that in Europe, industries use a larger share of water compared to the global average, where agriculture plays a bigger role. This, he argued, magnifies the challenges, but also creates certain opportunities around industrial water management. He went on to stress water’s role as a growth enabler; For instance, strategic autonomy relies on industries that are water-intensive, and the water-energy nexus is central for decarbonisation. Mr Townsend also discussed the environmental aspects of water, and stressed the need for a nature-centric approach to the Blue Deal. He then discussed the data challenge concerning water and the current fragmentation of available data. Better access to already available data would allow decision makers to better understand the growing gap between water supply and demand and to create effective policies. He closed by discussing water pricing, noting that risks translate into financial impacts, and that this can be built into pricing. He highlighted the link between water and energy use, which can be a driver for efficiency.



Michele Falcone,
Chair of SGI Europe Water Task Force

“In times of water scarcity, we have to avoid water conflicts among different users - consumers, agriculture and industries - as we should all have one goal in common: Using water sustainably and responsibly for the next generations to come by following the precautionary and control at source principle.”

Mr Falcone urged the legislators to harmonise and amend the existing fragmented legislation, arguing that the current rules contain loopholes and create conflicts between users. He also stressed the need to guarantee good quality water for citizens. In this regard, he highlighted the skills challenge, noting that the aging workforce in the sector is in need of reskilling and upskilling to become better stewards of European waters and to keep up with innovation in the sector. He also talked about the importance of collection and management of reliable and transparent water data at EU level. Discussing the challenges of service providers, he highlighted the importance of public information and the need to maintain public trust, for example as regards to PFAS chemicals present in the water. He concluded by discussing the importance of working with social partners and argued that a deep cultural change is needed to reduce waste and to facilitate a more open dialogue between water service providers and consumers.



Panel 3: Blue Deal financing and Blue Diplomacy

Introductory remarks: Milena Angelova,
Member of the EESC and rapporteur on the Blue Deal

In her introductory remarks, Ms Angelova discussed past and existing conflicts and crises caused by water scarcity and how water is being weaponised around the world. She stressed that if nothing changes, climate change and water scarcity will cause 1 billion people to migrate by 2050. She argued that the EU is in a unique position to push for water as an instrument of peace by championing both regional and global cooperation in water management and protection. Furthermore, she discussed financing and called for a Blue Transition Fund to enable necessary investments. Financing instruments should reflect the longer time horizons required and be flexible and agile instruments capable of ensuring the cross-cutting approach outlined by the Blue Deal Declaration.





Almotaz Abadi,
Deputy Secretary General for Water, Environment and Blue Economy,
Union for the Mediterranean

“Water issues cannot be solved on the technical level only. There is a need for the right skills, for good practitioners and for legal instruments, and, importantly, there is a need for political will.”

Advocating for a nexus approach to water, Mr Abadi stressed the key role played by diplomacy and development cooperation. Political will is needed to address water challenges, and the Ministerial Declaration on Water by the Union for the Mediterranean provides a strong signal in this regard. He stressed that the challenges are different for each country and called for well-designed solutions that allow the transition to happen smoothly, as certain changes take time. He called on EU leaders to synchronise their support for water management in non-EU countries with their work on development cooperation and the international aid framework. Mr Abadi then discussed the interlinkages between water, employment and migration, sharing examples of successful cooperation in the Mediterranean region and of promising pilot projects that support sustainable water management. He stressed the need to establish new legal instruments and technical mechanisms to make money available for sustainable investments in the Mediterranean region. He closed by highlighting the strong link between water and energy in the region and the need to respect a human rights approach to water as a public good.



Phoebe Koundouri,
Professor Athens University of Economics and Business & Technical
University of Denmark, President EAERE, Chair SDSN Global Climate Hub,
Co-chair SDSN Europe

“The call for an EU Blue Deal is crucial for the global sustainability transition, towards the implementation of the European Green Deal, the UN Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement.”

Professor Koundouri started by stating that a clear strategy is needed to address the current polycrisis, which includes the water, climate, ecosystem, energy and food crises coupled with slow growth and inflation. Water is connected to all SDGs, and the EU Blue Deal, the EU Green Deal and the SDG framework must be consistent with each other to achieve a holistic, integrated and interdisciplinary approach. Speaking of investments, she spoke about the importance of knowing the value of the contribution of water systems and the ecosystem services that water systems provide and understanding how these link to different production processes. She called for public-private financing with a long-term horizon and low interest rates, noting that this will require changing the global finance architecture. Using the “Water Futures” project as an example, she spoke about the need to extend, modernise and digitalise European water infrastructures, in order to make them resilient against floods, heatwaves and extreme pollution incidents. Echoing other speakers’ points about data, she showed the value of exact measurements and how developing policies based on good data can bring concrete results.



**Patricia Calderon,
Global Associate Director for Water, CDP**

“Water risks have a financial element for companies to consider. The cost of inaction is five times higher than the cost of action.”

Ms Calderon presented the work of CDP in the area of water security. This involves scoring companies according to their disclosure and environmental performance. Citing recent figures by the WWF, Ms Calderon noted that the annual economic value of global water and freshwater ecosystems is 58 trillion USD, which is equivalent to 60 per cent of global GDP. She stressed that companies are more and more starting to realise the water challenges and risks they are facing as well as the need to improve their environmental footprint. According to data disclosed to CDP, water-related risks were estimated to cost companies 392 billion USD annually. Companies report to being exposed to substantial water-related risks along the value chain, including water stress and scarcity, pollution, floods and droughts. According to Ms Calderon, the best-performing companies are not only improving their direct operations, but are also engaging their entire value chains in better water management. She also noted that companies are transitioning and reporting water-related opportunities. Pricing of water can be a driving force encouraging companies to find opportunities for efficiency.



**Video message from Erik Orsenna,
Economist specialised in water resource, member of the French Academy,
chairman of Initiatives for the Future of Great Rivers (IFGR)**

Professor Orsenna presented the work of his organisation working on the future of great rivers, which involves a wide range of professionals from different fields. He recalled water's essential role for life, for agriculture and industries, but also for energy and the natural environment. He stressed the rare nature of water and the threat humanity is facing by mismanaging it, bringing attention to the recent droughts and extreme floods around Europe. He thanked the EESC for the Blue Deal initiative and its comprehensive approach and warned that without action, water will become a source of conflict around the world, and also in Europe. He finished with a hopeful message stating that water has the ability to bring together generations as it is an element that is there for life.



Closing



Oliver Röpke,
President of the EESC

“We have the knowledge, we have the ideas, we have the social partners and civil society organisations on board, and we have a concrete proposal, so let’s kick off now.”

President Röpke closed the conference by stating that the Blue Deal Declaration and opinions provide a strong message and key demands, based on three pillars. Firstly, the objective is to bring fragmented policies together at EU level, under the EU Blue Deal, for a coherent water strategy. Secondly, he stressed the need to bring together the different existing funding instruments in a structured manner. And thirdly, he spoke about the importance of knowledge and clear and comparable data at EU and Member State level to support policy making. Mr Röpke stressed that the EESC will reach out again to the other Institutions with the Declaration, to make the EU Blue Deal a strategic, key priority in 2024, in the context of the EU elections. The EESC is launching a meaningful initiative, with a strategic view for the future. He finished by noting that this is an important moment, and that now is the time to set the agenda.







**European Economic
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