IWC11

11th GEF INTERNATIONAL WATERS CONFERENCE

19-22 OCTOBER 2026 • BALI, INDONESIA

# CONCEPT NOTE

**Organized by**

Ministry of Environment/
Environmental Protection Agency
Republic of Indonesia

**With the direction and support of**

## About

Established in 1991, the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, is an international partnership that provides funding to address global environmental issues. As an independent financial organization, the GEF provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for projects related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, the ozone layer, and persistent organic pollutants. These projects benefit the global environment, linking local, national, and global environmental challenges and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

The **GEF International Waters** (GEF IW) focal area focuses on the sustainable management of shared water resources that cross national boundaries. The program supports initiatives related to oceans, rivers, lakes, aquifers, and large marine ecosystems, by helping countries in working together to address water pollution, overfishing, and habitat degradation, integrated water resource management and ecosystem-based approaches. GEF IW investments promote integrated, cross-sectoral approaches, engaging public and private sectors, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions, and operate at multiple across transboundary watersheds.

**IW:LEARN** is GEF's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network. Acting as a service for the GEF International Waters (IW) Focal Area, it supports the portfolio by catalyzing knowledge management and experience sharing, building capacities to improve transboundary water management. Currently in its fifth project cycle (2022-2026), IW:LEARN is jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and executed by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC/UNESCO). Among IW:LEARN activities, which include supporting transboundary water governance by facilitating the exchange of experiences, tools, and lessons learned among GEF-funded projects, IW:LEARN supports the organization of the GEF International Waters Conference (IWC), the flagship knowledge-sharing and networking event for projects supported by the GEF under IW focal area.

Within this setting, the **11th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference (IWC11)** will take place from **19-22 October 2026** at the Anvaya Beach Resort in **Kuta, Bali**, **Indonesia**, kindly hosted by the Government of Indonesia.

## Context

In its eleventh edition, the International Waters Conference (IWC11) builds on more than three decades of achievements and lessons from the GEF International Waters (IW) portfolio to explore transformative solutions for addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution across transboundary freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems.

IWC11 takes place at a pivotal moment. Heightened geopolitical uncertainty is making cooperation over shared natural resources increasingly complex, hydro-diplomacy is under growing pressure, and emerging environmental challenges continue to test existing governance models. At the same time, new opportunities are reshaping the future of transboundary water management. Digital innovation, advances in science and data, stronger cross-sectoral partnerships, and integrated approaches are creating new pathways for cooperation, resilience and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, **transformative change** is no longer optional but essential. Accelerating collective action to restore planetary health and address global water challenges requires stronger partnerships, innovative financing, inclusive governance and integrated solutions. The timing of IWC11 is particularly significant as it coincides with the global progress assessment towards Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, while also supporting the early implementation of the Ninth Replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-9).

The GEF continues to play a catalytic role within the international environmental finance architecture, supporting countries in delivering integrated and scalable solutions to global environmental challenges. As reaffirmed during the 71st GEF Council Meeting and the Eighth GEF Assembly (Samarkand, 31 May–5 June 2026), GEF-9 places particular emphasis on:

- promoting Integrated Programmes that deliver systems transformation through holistic, cross-sectoral and nexus approaches;
- scaling up blended finance and innovative financing mechanisms that mobilize private capital alongside public and concessional finance;
- strengthening support for vulnerable countries and communities, including Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing

States (SIDS), and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs); and

- advancing "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" approaches that recognize the essential contributions of civil society organizations, youth, women, IPLCs and other stakeholders in achieving global environmental objectives.

Within this broader agenda, the GEF International Waters focal area remains a cornerstone for advancing transboundary cooperation and sustainable management of shared freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems for lasting GEBs. The **GEF-9 International Waters (IW) strategy** builds on the success of GEF-8 and includes the GEF's role as part of the financial mechanism for the BBNJ Agreement. The IW strategy focuses on three objectives:

a. Strengthening sustainable management in shared coastal and marine ecosystems
b. Supporting the BBNJ Agreement
c. Strengthening sustainable management of shared freshwater systems.

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) **evaluation of the GEF International Waters Focal Area** (2025) reinforces this strategic direction. The evaluation found that the IW portfolio has progressively strengthened integrated programming and the enabling environment across successive GEF replenishment cycles. While GEF-5 and GEF-6 focused primarily on transboundary cooperation, large marine ecosystems, marine fisheries and coastal pollution reduction, GEF-7 and GEF-8 expanded the portfolio towards blue economy approaches, water security, and areas beyond national jurisdiction. Over this period, investments increasingly shifted towards multi-focal area programming, reflecting the GEF's growing emphasis on integrated solutions. The evaluation also concludes that the IW portfolio has consistently advanced gender equality and social inclusion. However, despite notable project-level successes, engagement with the private sector has remained below expectations and represents an important opportunity for future programming.

The **outcomes of IWC10** (Punta del Este, Uruguay, 2024) further reinforce these findings. Conference participants identified sustainable finance and private sector engagement, transboundary governance and cooperation,

and inclusive approaches as priority areas requiring greater attention in the coming years.

Against this backdrop, IWC11 provides a timely platform to support the GEF International Waters community as it enters a new phase of programming under GEF-9. By bringing together GEF IW projects and their country counterparts, GEF Agencies, international organizations, financial institutions, the private sector, civil society and academia, the conference will foster dialogue, strengthen partnerships, exchange on innovative solutions and help shape the next generation of integrated, inclusive and transformative action for transboundary water and ecosystem management and conservation.

## Conference Objectives

The 11th International Waters Conference (IWC11) aims to:

1) Capture **knowledge and experience** generated in 30+ years of GEF IW;
2) Enable the transition towards **systems change for transboundary water management;**
3) Pave the way for strengthened **collaboration**, improved **partnerships** and diversified **financing.**

## Expected Outcomes

Building on the four days of technical exchanges, dialogue and knowledge sharing, IWC11 is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

1. **Strengthened common understanding of transformative solutions, lessons learned and scalable approaches** from the GEF International Waters portfolio;
2. **Greater consensus on the key enablers of systems transformation** for transboundary freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, including governance, financing, innovation, partnerships and capacity development.
3. **Enhanced capacity of GEF Agencies and project partners to design and implement integrated, finance-ready and partnership-driven IW projects under GEF-9**,
4. **Increased awareness, uptake and application of practical tools, methodologies and good practices** across the GEF International Waters community to strengthen project design, implementation and adaptive management.

5. **Strengthened collaboration and sustained engagement among countries, GEF Agencies and strategic partners**, fostering continued knowledge exchange, peer learning and joint action beyond IWC11.

## Expected Outputs

1. IWC11 Conference report.
2. Update edition of the GEF IW:LEARN Tools compendium 2025.
3. IWC11 results framework populated with indicators.

## Overarching Theme and thematic days

The IWC11 overarching theme **"Shared Waters, Transformative Solutions: Enabling Systems Change"** reflects the conference objectives, giving a forward-looking direction to the discussions in light of today's challenges in the IW realm, the availability of innovative tools and the preparation for the new GEF-9 cycle.

Like previous IWC editions, each day will follow its own thematic direction, which will set the tone for the different sessions throughout the day:

- Day 1 - Shared Waters, Collective Knowledge: scalable and replicable solutions for a changing future
- Day 3 - Innovation in Action: from cooperation to systems change
- Day 4 - IW Legacy to Impact: strengthened collaboration and future outlook

## Conference Architecture and agenda at-a-glance

IWC11 will include:

- Two days of pre-conference workshops (17-18 October 2026)
- Three days of sessions (19 & 21-22 October 2026)
- One day of technical site visits (20 October 2026)

IWC11 will offer numerous exchanging opportunities among project representatives, the GEF Secretariat, GEF agencies and partner institutions involved in GEF IW projects. All activities undertaken in the execution of a GEF IW project are eligible for a session, either under the overarching and daily themes, or as session-specific topics. Session types include: **Plenary Sessions** (with invited speakers), **Special Sessions**, **IW Clinics** and **Workshops**. The IWC11 venue will also host a permanent space for **exhibitions** and **posters**.

Further, participants will be offered several opportunities for networking and exchange:

- **Welcome reception**: A socializing event to welcome participants;
- **Film Festival:** Displaying a selection of short films highlighting GEF IW project results and experiences;
- **Technical Site Visits**: Tours around Bali to witness local water management practices and cultural experiences, and to allow for informal networking;
- **Networking Event:** Evening networking and socializing event celebrating the 11th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference.

Below is presented the draft agenda-at-a-glance.

<table>
<tr><th>Pre-conference Workshops</th><th>Pre-conference Workshops</th><th>Shared Waters, Collective Knowledge: scalable and replicable solutions for a changing future</th><th>Technical site visits</th><th>Innovation in Action: from cooperation to systems change</th><th>IW Legacy to Impact: strengthened collaboration and future outlook</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="8">09:00 - 17:00<br>Workshop 1:<br>Sustainable Financing</td><td rowspan="8">09:00 - 17:00<br>Workshop 2:<br>SIDS Inter-regional Dialogue<br><br>Workshop 3:<br>Strategic Communications<br><br>(in paralel)</td><td>09:00-10:30<br>Opening Ceremony</td><td rowspan="8">Technical site visits</td><td>09:00 - 10:30<br>Plenary</td><td>09:10:30<br>Plenary</td></tr>
<tr><td>10:30 - 11:00<br>Networking over coffee<br>+ exhibitions and posters</td><td>10:30 - 11:00<br>Networking over coffee<br>+ exhibitions and posters</td><td>10:30 - 11:00<br>Networking over coffee<br>+ exhibitions and posters</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:00 - 12:30<br>Plenary</td><td>11:00 - 12:30<br>Thematic workshops<br>(max 5)</td><td>11:00 - 12:30<br>Special session<br>(max 3)</td></tr>
<tr><td>12:30 - 14:00 Lunch</td><td>12:30 - 14:00 Lunch</td><td>12:30 - 14:00 Lunch</td></tr>
<tr><td>14:00 - 15:30<br>Special session<br>(max 3)</td><td>14:00 - 15:30<br>IW Clinics (max 8)</td><td>14:00 - 15:30<br>Thematic workshops<br>(max 5)</td></tr>
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<tr><td>16:00 - 17:30<br>Thematic workshops<br>(max 5)</td><td>16:30 - 17:30<br>IW Clinics (max 8)</td><td>16:00 - 17:30<br>Closing Ceremony</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>17:00 - 19:00<br>Registration - Foyer</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>19:00-20:30<br>Film festival</td><td>19:00 - 21:00<br>Welcome reception</td><td>19:00 - 21:00<br>Netwoking event</td></tr>
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*Note: Please note that this tentative agenda is still subject to change*

## Pre-conference Workshops

Two days of pre-conference workshops will be held on **17 and 18 October 2026**, in the same venue of the conference. The topics respond to the priorities as expressed by the IW portfolio in multiple surveys. More information on the content of the workshops will be circulated in due course. The workshops will run in parallel over the two days:

**Day 1: 17 October 2026**

1. Sustainable Financing [for project managers and agencies]

**Day 2: 18 October 2026**

2. SIDS Inter-regional Dialogue
3. Strategic Communications

## Contacts

For more information, please contact the IWC11 Organizing Team at: iwc11-secretariat@iwlearn.org and consult the conference website for future announcements: https://iwlearn.net/11th-international-waters-conference-iwc11