

Water catastrophe

Water's negative impact on ecosystems and the consequences for populations are well-known.

Indeed, the vast majority of natural disasters are connected to water, and floods lead to 70% of the resulting deaths. Climate change is causing more extreme weather events, from heavy rains to persistent droughts depending on the region and season. The warming of ocean surface water often fuels intense cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons.

Urbanisation and intensive agriculture, soil sealing and deforestation are forcing a change in soil use, and therefore an increase in run-off and depletion of groundwater. We destroy around 15 to 18 million hectares of forest (an area approximately the size of Belgium) every year, with 2 400 trees cut down each minute. The use of synthetic fertilisers and poorly managed irrigation has a destructive impact on ecosystems and biodiversity. For the last 20 years, we have been losing 2 000 hectares a day to soil salinisation, affecting more than 62 million hectares, or 20% of irrigated land. Water artificially contaminated with excess nitrogen causes eutrophication and hypoxia in oceans and rivers. More than 500 dead zones covering 250 000 square kilometres have already been identified – and this figure has been doubling every ten years since the 1960s.

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As far as public health is concerned, diarrhoea originating from contaminated water is estimated to cause 842 000 deaths a year.

I could go on. I have witnessed these phenomena first-hand during my photographic expeditions. I have seen the drying-up of the Aral Sea, the floods caused by Hurricane Katrina, and green algae in Brittany.

A change to our development model is therefore long overdue.