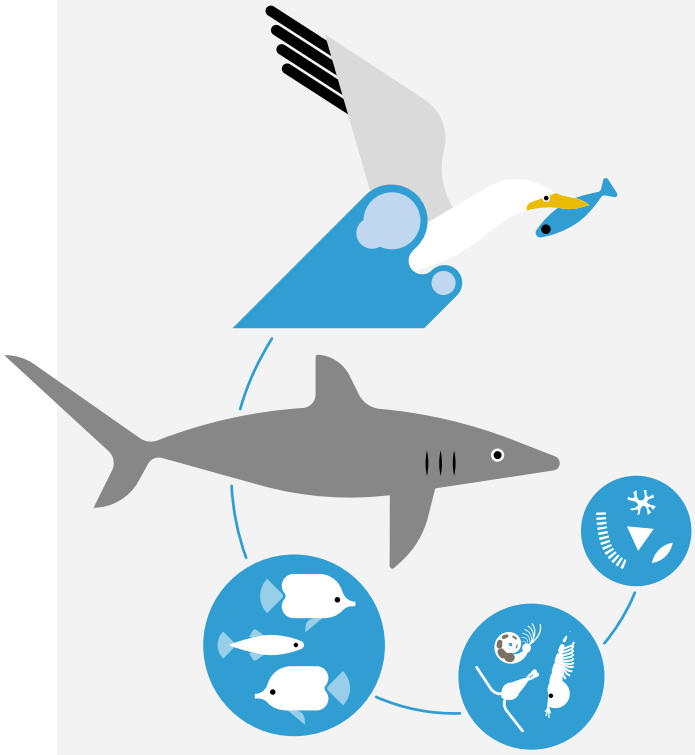
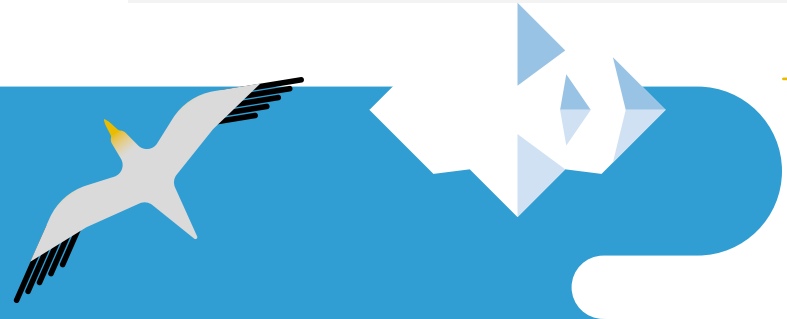
2025 Fact Sheet on

# MERCURY AND BIODIVERSITY

- Mercury is a highly hazardous substance that poses serious threats to human health and the environment. Once released from anthropogenic activities, it **persists and accumulates in ecosystems**, including tropical forests, mangroves, oceans, and polar regions, resulting in **serious impacts on biodiversity**.



- Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) and stationary combustion of coal are the largest sources of anthropogenic mercury emissions, together accounting for **around 60% of the global total**. Mercury is emitted and released to air, land, and water, entering terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. ASGM often occurs in or near biodiverse and ecologically sensitive areas, directly or indirectly affecting up to **100 million people and wildlife populations worldwide**.
- Once in the environment, inorganic mercury can be transformed by bacteria into methylmercury, a highly toxic form that **bioaccumulates and biomagnifies through the food chain**, resulting in higher concentrations in the bigger organisms than in the surrounding environment, and affecting fish, birds, mammals, and ultimately humans.
- Mercury is **transported across ecosystems by migratory species**, such as birds and marine mammals, extending its reach to remote areas including the Arctic, and even at the bottom of the Mariana Trench, the deepest oceanic point on the planet.
- **Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities**, especially those with strong dependence on natural ecosystems, are disproportionately affected by mercury exposure. In addition to significant health impacts, mercury pollution threatens **food security, economic livelihoods, spirituality, and culture**.



UN environment programme

MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

# WHAT THE CONVENTION SAYS

By implementing measures to control, reduce and eliminate mercury pollution, **the Minamata Convention on Mercury directly contributes to the conservation of biological diversity** and the broader global efforts to address the **triple planetary crisis** of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change.

The Convention recognizes the interconnections between mercury pollution and biodiversity loss and underscores the need for coordinated action to protect ecosystems and human health, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Several core obligations directly contribute to safeguarding ecosystems and the species they support.

- **Article 8** addresses emissions to the atmosphere from specified point sources, including coal-fired power plants and non-ferrous metals production.
- **Article 9** requires Parties to identify and control releases to land and water from relevant sources.
- Provisions on mercury supply (**Article 3**), mercury-added products (**Article 4**), and environmentally sound waste management (**Article 11**) further help prevent mercury from entering ecosystems.

# WHAT WE DO

- Parties that take measures to reduce mercury emissions and releases are contributing to the protection of human health and the environment, safeguarding biodiversity.
- Parties are required to apply **best available techniques and best environmental practices (BAT/BEP)** to control emissions from relevant sources, and to take appropriate measures to identify and reduce releases to land and water. National inventories help identify key sources of mercury affecting ecosystems and guide targeted control actions.
- At its **fifth meeting (COP-5)**, **the Conference of the Parties recognized mercury pollution as a driver of biodiversity loss** and encouraged Parties to support the coherent implementation of both the Convention and the Global Biodiversity Framework to generate co-benefits across their agendas.
- Parties are encouraged to integrate mercury control measures into revised or updated **national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs)**, promote research on mercury's effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and share experiences to support coordination across chemical and biodiversity policy agendas.
- The secretariat supports these efforts by facilitating **cooperation with biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements**, developing technical guidance, and promoting joint initiatives. It also provides technical assistance, awareness-raising, and knowledge sharing to enhance Parties' capacities to reduce the impacts of mercury on biodiversity.

# REFERENCES


- Minamata Convention text and annexes
- Publication on mercury and biodiversity
- Interlinkages between the chemicals and waste multilateral environmental agreements and biodiversity: Key Insights
- Infographic on mercury and biodiversity
- Minamata Convention at UN Biodiversity COP-16
- Convention on Biological Diversity


# MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty that helps countries to control, reduce and eliminate mercury across all its life-stages with the objective to protect human health and the environment.

It is named after the bay in Japan where, in the mid-20th century, mercury-tainted industrial wastewater poisoned thousands of people, leading to severe health damage that became known as the "Minamata disease". Since it entered into force on 16 August 2017, Parties have been working together to control the mercury supply and trade, reduce the use, emissions and releases of mercury, raise public awareness, and build the necessary institutional capacity.

Minamata Convention website
**https://minamataconvention.org**