PRESS RELEASE
Barcelona - 24/09/2026

International young talent designs the future of water in Barcelona

- The Wetskills Final Gala closes twelve days of intensive work between young talent and water sustainability experts
- The winning team presented a proposal for water-positive management of major events

A proposal to transform water management at major events was the winning solution at the Wetskills Barcelona Final Gala, hosted this Wednesday by the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC BarcelonaTech). Young people from 12 countries, including UPC students, worked side by side with water sustainability experts for twelve days to respond to real challenges set by public and private sector organisations.

The programme, developed by Wetskills Foundation, concluded on September 23 at UPC BarcelonaTech, where teams presented their solutions to the programme's challenges through a pitch. The event featured an institutional opening by José Antonio Travieso, Director of EEBE, followed by a series of remarks from representatives of the organisations behind the programme.

Johan Oost, Director of Wetskills, stressed during his address that "in just two weeks, each team has to understand a complex challenge, come up with a solution, and defend it in a two-minute pitch in front of a jury. That pressure, well supported, brings out the best in people and prepares young talent for the real world."

Four challenges, one shared roadmap for water

First prize recognised the proposal for helping a major international event leave a positive water footprint on its host territory. Using the 2031 Ryder Cup in Catalonia as their case study, the winning team estimated the water footprint associated with an event of that scale and proposed reduction measures. Through funding for local projects with a positive water impact, the team calculated the investment needed for the event to return more water than it consumes. The jury singled out the proposal for its ability to translate all that technical work into a simple, actionable formula.

Beyond the winning project, participating teams also presented proposals for other real-world challenges, including: regenerative, water-positive Mediterranean tourism (Veolia España), water reuse in the Netherlands (Hollands Noorderkwartier Water Authority - HHNK), and balancing groundwater rights with municipal network use in South Africa (Department of Water and Sanitation).

To shape their proposals, all four teams relied on the Act4Water Standard, a framework that certifies projects and organisations with a positive water impact through a system of Water Credits, known as Credits Aqua Positive (CAPs). Craig Tinashe, representing the Act4Water initiative, noted that "Wetskills participants have learned that innovation doesn't just need to create impact, it needs to be lasting, measurable, and demonstrable."

Veolia, connecting innovation with talent

Veolia took part in Wetskills Spain Barcelona 2026 by bringing an innovative challenge focused on regenerative, water-positive tourism. Under the title "Water Positive Tourism: How can Mediterranean destinations evolve their water stewardship from efficiency to regeneration?", Veolia challenged participating teams to design original concepts that would help Mediterranean tourist destinations move beyond water efficiency towards genuine water regeneration.

Throughout the programme, Veolia provided teams with support from experts in sustainability, water reuse, and water footprint, offering technical and strategic guidance for the development of innovative solutions. As part of the experience, participants visited the Museu de les Aigües and the Prat Water Regeneration Station, landmark facilities that demonstrate how water reuse and the diversification of water uses help make the Barcelona metropolitan area more resilient to water-related challenges. Teams also visited Cetaqua, the Water Technology Centre, a successful public-private collaboration model where Veolia, UPC, and CSIC drive collaborative research and accelerate both young talent and innovation in the water sector. "These visits allowed students and young professionals to see first-hand how innovation in water management is key to building sustainable destinations and cities," said Desirée Marín, Innovation and Sustainability Director at Veolia in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.

--

About Wetskills Foundation
Wetskills Foundation is a Dutch non-profit organisation dedicated to connecting young water talent with real-world challenges through intensive international programmes.

About Veolia
Veolia is a leading company in decarbonisation, the circular economy, and optimised resource management: energy, water, and waste. Through its three complementary activities, it supports the sustainable development of cities and industries.

About Act4Water
Act4Water was born from the collaboration between Water Footprint Network, Water Footprint Implementation, Cetaqua, and Fundación Aquae, to bring technical knowledge about water footprint to the business world. Its standard offers projects and organisations an official, verifiable certification mechanism to demonstrate their positive water impact through the Water Footprint and Credits Aqua Positive (CAPs).

Press contact
José Ramón Narejos | jose.narejos@act4water.org | (+44) 7305 681100