



# Earth Negotiations Bulletin

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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CSD INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 1998

Delegates to the Commission on Sustainable Development's *Ad Hoc* Intersessional Working Group on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management heard presentations regarding freshwater activities in Russia and the Netherlands. Norway and Malta also gave brief presentations. They received the Co-Chairs' draft report and considered it in regional and interest groups during the afternoon.

### EXCHANGE OF NATIONAL EXPERIENCES ON INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION:** Georgi S. Volovik discussed sustainable water management in the Russian Federation. He explained that water resources in Russia are exhausted, watersheds are degrading, technical breakdowns occur more frequently, natural disasters result in significant damage and the tension of the social and political situation is growing. Most rivers and lakes are highly contaminated by biological and economic activities, the quality of surface waters rarely meet sanitary requirements, and groundwater sources are becoming increasingly polluted. He explained that the water use crisis originated in the totalitarian model of the former USSR's economic system. Though this system no longer exists, the principles of organization and management of the water sector remain, pointing to the need to develop and implement a new federal water management policy. Several laws have been issued recently, indicating that a new legislative and legal basis for regulating water relations is developing. He emphasized that the new governmental policy in the field of water use and protection has a humanitarian emphasis, focusing on the protection of human life and health and favorable environmental conditions.

He underscored that sustainable water use must feature a correspondence of social, environmental and economic factors. The principle goal of Russia's policy is meeting the demand of population and industry in standard quality water with minimum damage to the environment. The objectives are: continuous provision of the necessary amount of quality potable water to the population; provision to the various economic sectors of adequate quality water; protection from hazardous effects of floods, water erosion and droughts; and gradual rehabilitation of water bodies to ensure favorable conditions for aquatic organisms. Sustainable water use is a strategic goal of the policy; however, there is a large disparity between the proclaimed objectives and the actual situation.

He outlined basic principles of a sustainable water management policy: a basin approach; gradual minimization of harmful effects on water bodies; cost-effectiveness and self-financing of water manage-

ment; phase-in and comprehensive analysis of reform implementation; and public awareness and participation. Action programmes and plans that are being or will be implemented include: forming social-environmental-economic systems of river basins; supplying potable water to the population; rehabilitating watersheds and river networks; reconstructing basin water management complexes; and addressing trans-boundary issues.

Priority directions of the policy include, *inter alia*: rehabilitating and protecting water bodies and augmenting water resources; rehabilitating and maintaining stable environmental conditions of basins; protecting and efficiently using water resources; improving the management regime of reservoirs and water management systems; reducing enterprises' water consumption and water losses; improving drinking water quality; and establishing economic water use mechanisms. He emphasized that water management must be based on sound science and data, monitoring and public awareness.

He concluded that the major shortfall in water management was a lack of comprehensive federal policy aimed at specific results. A new water management system has not yet been established, but there is a unique opportunity to do so now. He stated that water management objectives should be strictly divided into those of management and those of economic supply.

**NETHERLANDS:** Presenting the background to preparations for the Fourth Netherlands Water Management Plan, Albert van der Beesen described problems confronting a delta area where subsidence and protection against flooding pose eternal challenges. Sixty-four percent of the land is below sea level. He described how policies on water quantity and water quality were brought together in the third integrated water management plan in 1990. He used marketing techniques when developing the fourth policy plan, including a market plan to identify target groups and consumption patterns. Consideration was given to social, political and organizational questions. Two minimum conditions were recognized: the need for a win-win situation and a fair choice.

He said this process led to a new way to produce a policy document: ask what people want and need; listen carefully; let other departments contribute; show everyone what has been done; make clear that not everyone can be pleased by the outcome. The preparation process included an initial discussion paper followed by meetings with stakeholder groups, distribution of a booklet to everyone involved in the discussion, and publication of the new water management strategy.

The main objective of the strategy is a safe and habitable country with resilient water systems working with nature and not against it. The document advocates living with water in a natural way, demanding behavioral change and preparedness to undertake coopera-

This issue of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* © <enb@iisd.org> is written and edited by Chad Carpenter, LL.M <chadc@iisd.org>, Peter Doran <pdforan@ecology.u-net.com>, Kira Schmidt <kiras@iisd.org> and Lynn Wagner, Ph.D. <lynn@iisd.org>. The Editor is Pamela Chasek, Ph.D. <pam@iisd.org> and the Managing Editor is Langston James "Kimo" Goree VI <kimo@iisd.org>. The Sustaining Donors of the *Bulletin* are the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation, the Government of Canada (through CIDA) and the United States (through USAID). General Support for the *Bulletin* during 1998 is provided by the Government of Norway and the Ministry for the Environment in Iceland. Funding for the French version has been provided by ACCT/IEPF, with support from the French Ministry of Cooperation and the Québec Ministry of the Environment and Wildlife. The *Bulletin* can be contacted by e-mail at <enb@iisd.org> and at tel: +1-212-644-0204; fax: +1-212-644-0206. IISD can be contacted by e-mail at <info@iisd.ca> and at 161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0Y4, Canada. The opinions expressed in the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD and other funders. Excerpts from the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* may be used in non-commercial publications only and only with appropriate academic citation. For permission to use this material in commercial publications, contact the Managing Editor. Electronic versions of the *Bulletin* are sent to e-mail distribution lists and can be found on the Linkages WWW server at <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/>. The satellite image was taken above Harare © 1998 The Living Earth, Inc. <http://livingearth.com>. For further information on ways to access, support or contact the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, send e-mail to <enb@iisd.org>.



tive problem solving. The strategy emphasizes the relations between water, physical planning, the environment and nature protection. An area approach is adopted, incorporating water in urban areas via regional water systems and oceans. Themes that receive special attention include flood protection, water depletion, emissions and polluted aquatic soil.

The annual costs for flood protection, water quantity and quality management comes to almost 6 billion Guilders, funded by self-governing water boards who receive monies from people in their areas. For water quality, the polluter pays principle is used. The Netherlands Development Assistance includes one billion Guilders per annum on water-related projects overseas. Most is spent on bilateral projects, with some going to the UN/World Bank. The projects cover capacity building, policy reform, cross-border issues and human resources development.

**NORWAY** described its integrated master plan for managing water resources, which determines where hydroelectric power development may be pursued. The plan calls for, *inter alia*, full stakeholder participation and has made the evaluation procedure more efficient. A new water management act will be adopted soon.

**MALTA** said problems related to salinity levels in its water table have demanded the development of alternative approaches to water supply at a high cost. Malta recently introduced pricing policies on freshwater and sewage disposal and is conducting an analysis of delivery systems to reduce waste.

#### **DRAFT CO-CHAIRS' REPORT**

The following is a summary of the Draft Co-Chairs' Report circulated in the afternoon.

**BACKGROUND:** This section emphasizes the importance of integrated planning of water resources development and management. Provisions of Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 and related paragraphs of the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 are highlighted, particularly the latter's call for a CSD dialogue on freshwater.

**KEY ISSUES FOR A PROCESS TO BE LAUNCHED BY CSD-6:** This section states that the CSD process on water should focus on: supporting national and international action; identifying emerging issues and gaps; building a global consensus; and promoting greater cooperation. The dialogue should address gaps, including: lack of awareness of freshwater resources' scope and function; absence of links with socioeconomic development; declining capacity to assess water resource availability and variability; and mobilization of financial resources. It states that most actions related to integrated water management must occur at the local and national levels.

**ACTIONS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION:** The section notes that policy formulation requires governments to take into account existing conventions and programmes of action, such as on biodiversity, desertification and climate change. Governments should also: consider the recommendations of the Harare Expert Group meeting; address the Noordwijk Action Programme on the need for achieving universal access to water supplies; and intensify the development of local and national integrated water management plans. It also suggests a number of specific national-level activities, including those requiring international support, in the following areas:

**Information for decision making:** Governments are encouraged to establish and maintain national and international information and monitoring networks, promote the dissemination of information and data and encourage harmonization. Other suggestions address: national water-related indicators; water quality inventories; and regional consultations on drought or flood preparedness.

**Institutions, capacity building and participation:** Governments are urged to establish national coordination mechanisms to involve all relevant parts of governments in policy formulation. They are urged to:

improve legislative and regulatory frameworks; strengthen institutional and human capacities at national and local levels; and establish an enabling environment for partnerships between public, private and community organizations.

**Technology transfer and research cooperation:** Governments are encouraged to stimulate research and development cooperation, together with the development of technologies for sustainable water management to increase efficiency and reduce pollution. The promotion of innovative approaches, such as Build, Operate and Transfer, implementation of best practices, and use of international and regional EST centers, is encouraged. Donor countries and international organizations are urged to enhance technical assistance programmes aimed at facilitating the choice and acquisition of appropriate technologies.

**Economics and finance:** The draft notes the need to mobilize increased financial resources, particularly in relation to poverty eradication. Evidence that existing resources are used optimally will help mobilize additional finance from national and international sources. Strengthened consultative mechanisms aimed at improving donor/recipient dialogues and transparent subsidies closely targeted at low-income households and small producers are proposed, as are consideration of the 20/20 initiative and analysis of the economic value of the benefits provided by ecosystems and the cost of their degradation. Finally, the international community is invited to consider the creation of a special financial mechanism.

#### **FOLLOW-UP AND ASSESSMENT**

**Structure of the dialogue under the auspices of the CSD:** Governments are invited to report to the CSD in 2002 regarding national integrated water resources management policies and to organize meetings to exchange experiences.

**Action in the UN system:** UN organizations, through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, are urged to develop and submit to the CSD in 2002 a consolidated UN Guidebook on Integrated Water Resources Management to replace existing sectoral guidelines, and to elaborate an International Programme of Action outlining ways and means on international support for national actions.

#### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

After their first reading of the draft Co-Chairs' Report, NGO representatives indicated that delegates at the Intersessional have some way to go on a number of key issues. NGOs will be looking for improvements in the following areas, among others: acknowledgement of the special roles and responsibilities of women, notably in developing countries, and the need to take account of their local knowledge of water issues; the need to integrate Local Agenda 21 strategies to ensure participatory approaches in implementation; the centrality of ecosystem processes; and institutional linkages with related processes such as the UNFCCC.

#### **THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY**

**ISWG:** The ISWG is expected to meet in the Trusteeship Council room during the morning and afternoon to comment on the Co-Chairs' draft text. The French delegation is also expected to provide information regarding the Paris Ministers' meeting on water and sustainable development scheduled for 19-21 March.