



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND



First Workshop

River Basin Commissions and other Joint Bodies for Transboundary Water Cooperation: Legal and Institutional Aspects

23-24 September 2013
Palais des Nations, Geneva



Deadlines:

Registration for participants requesting financial support – by 10 August 2013

Registration for other participants – by 5 September 2013

Background

Approximately 40 per cent of the world's population lives in river and lake basins that cross the political boundaries of two or more countries. Over 90 percent of the world's population lives within the countries that share these basins.

However many of these transboundary waters are not covered by agreements of the riparian states and do not have joint institutional structures in charge of their joint management and cooperation. Notably, 158 of the world's 263 international river basins, plus transboundary aquifer systems, lack any type of cooperative management framework (UN-Water 2008).

Even where joint institutions exist, growing pressures on water resources coupled with the impacts of climate change, magnify the challenges for implementation of existing agreements and achieving progress in transboundary water cooperation, and therefore call for strengthening the governance frameworks and building a response capacity. In some cases, economic and technological development, regional integration, emergence of new stakeholders or other factors of evolving context require updating existing agreements and strengthening joint institutions.

The 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) recognizes that effective joint bodies are key to ensuring sustainable management of transboundary water resources. Therefore, the conclusion of agreements between countries sharing transboundary waters and the establishment of joint bodies such as river, lake or aquifer commissions is a main obligation under the Water Convention which supports their creation and reinforcement.

Over the past decades, there has been a considerable increase in the number of joint institutions for transboundary water management. A wealth of experience was accumulated by such institutions and their participating countries in various political, geographic, economic and social contexts.

By exchanging experience and improving the understanding of legal and institutional frameworks, as well as operational practices of the joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation, the capacity, tasks, mandates and activities of such institutions could be reinforced.

Why two workshops?

Recognizing the importance of exchange of experience on the establishment and functioning of joint bodies, the Parties to the Water Convention have included in the Work Programme for 2013-2015 two workshops to promote the exchange of experience and good practices between joint bodies worldwide and to draw lessons learned and recommendations.

The *First Workshop* to be organised on 23-24 September 2013 is devoted to legal and institutional aspects of the establishment and operation of joint bodies.

The *Second Workshop*, tentatively planned for 9-10 April 2014, will focus on specific areas and technical aspects of cooperation in the framework of joint bodies, such as cooperation on preservation and restoration of ecosystems, water infrastructure, contingency planning, navigation, fisheries, etc. Specific topics for the *Second Workshop* will be selected on the basis of the recommendations of participants made during the *First Workshop*.

Objectives

The *First Workshop* convened in the International Year of Water Cooperation aims to highlight opportunities and inspire effective practices/solutions in advancing the legal and institutional frameworks and tools for transboundary water cooperation through the exchange of experience and cross-fertilization within existing joint bodies, as well as to support the emergence of new joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation.

It is also intended to contribute to the establishment of cooperation and to provide a forum for networking between different joint bodies from across the world, and to build capacity for their effective functioning.

More specifically, the *First Workshop* aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Present and discuss the experience of legal and institutional arrangements, procedures and working methods of joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation worldwide, to enable identification of challenges and good practices and sharing of experience;
- Discuss past successes and ongoing efforts to establish new agreements and joint bodies, identify challenges and strategies to

address them, as well as lessons learned, with a view to guide such efforts in the basins and aquifers not covered by agreements and joint institutions;

- Increase awareness on international water law instruments, in particular the Water Convention and the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, their compatibility and mutual complementarity, as well as the 2008 ILC Draft articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers, and introduce joint bodies outside the UNECE region to the multilateral cooperation framework provided by the Water Convention.

Topics

The *First Workshop* will consist of a mix of plenary sessions and discussions in working groups focusing on the following topics:

- 1) Efforts to establish new agreements and joint bodies (obstacles, challenges and strategies in negotiation process, role of third parties, role of international framework agreements, concept of benefit sharing, etc.)
- 2) Legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation through joint bodies (scope, competences, organizational structures and regulations, financing, involvement of stakeholders, implementation structures at national level, etc.)
- 3) Primary tools and methods of effective daily cooperation (exchange of data and information, coordinated or joint monitoring, consultations on planned measures, joint action plans and programmes, etc.)
- 4) Conflict prevention and dispute settlement – the role of joint bodies.

A detailed programme will be issued in August 2013.

Organization of work

The *First Workshop* will be organized on 23 and 24 September 2013, back-to-back with the eighth meeting of the Water Convention's Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (25 September 2013).

The *First Workshop* is organized under the leadership of the governments of Finland and Germany, and in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Hydrological Programme (IHP), Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), Global Water Partnership (GWP), International Commission for the Protection of

the Danube River (ICPDR) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The meeting is funded by the governments of Estonia, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg.

Reference material

An informal document with reference material and publications on the topics of the *First Workshop* will be made available on the following website in due course:

http://www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_joint_bodies_2013.html

Participants are welcome to make available any other relevant material at the meeting.

Participation

The *First Workshop* is an important step in the process of the opening of the Water Convention, following the entry into force on 6 February 2013 of the amendments allowing accession to the Convention to all United Nations Member States. Experts from all over the world are invited to participate and share their knowledge and experience.

The meeting will be attended by governmental representatives with hands-on experience of participation in the existing joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation, as well as those working on the establishment of new agreements and institutions for transboundary water cooperation.

It will also be attended by representatives of joint bodies' secretariats, organizations promoting river basin management, partners, experts, and academia.

When planning the nomination for the meeting, nominating institutions and organizations are recommended to take into account different thematic focuses of the two workshops, and nominate for the *First Workshop* those individuals that are specifically responsible for legal and institutional aspects.

Practical information and registration

The meeting will start at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, 23 September 2013 and end at 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 September 2013. The working languages will be English, French, Russian and Spanish. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided. The meeting will be held in the Palais des Nations in room V.

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience. Participants eligible for financial support should register **by 10 August 2013. Requests received after this deadline will not be processed.** Due to the limited funds available, priority will be given to experts providing inputs to the workshop. Participants who do not ask for financial support should register by **5 September 2013.**

Participants are requested to complete the **registration form** available online at

http://www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_joint_bodies_2013.html
and to transmit it to the UNECE secretariat either by fax (+ 41 22 917 0107) or e-mail (katri.veldre@unece.org).

Participants requiring entry visas should inform the secretariat as soon as possible. The minimum amount of time needed for obtaining a visa is 15 working days since Switzerland is part of the Schengen zone. Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to initiate visa procedures at least three weeks before the meeting.

On their way to the meeting, participants should obtain an identification badge at the Pass and Identification Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva Security and Safety Section located at the Pregny Gate, 14 Avenue de la Paix (see map on the UNECE Water Convention website). Please allow time for this. In case of difficulty, please contact the secretariat by telephone at +41 22 917 1911.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available online at:

<http://www.unece.org/meetings/practical.htm>

Further information about the workshop will be made available on the following website in due course:

http://www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_joint_bodies_2013.html

Contact information

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