



Second Workshop

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

Information notice

9-10 April 2014
Palais des Nations, Geneva



Deadlines:

Registration for participants requesting financial support – by 21 February 2014
Registration for other participants – by 28 March 2014

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, more than a half of the world's 276 international river basins, plus transboundary aquifer systems, lack any type of cooperative management framework.

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. The Water Convention specifies various tasks for joint bodies and a number of activities under the Convention supports joint bodies in their work.

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.

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*, organized on 23–24 September 2013, was devoted to legal and institutional aspects of the establishment and operation of joint bodies. The motivation was that 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.

The *First Workshop* convened in the International Year of Water Cooperation aimed 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 was 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.

The *Second Workshop*, described below, which will be held 9-10 April 2014, will focus on specific areas and technical aspects of cooperation in the framework of joint bodies, such as preservation and restoration of ecosystems, water infrastructure, etc. Topics for the *Second Workshop* were developed taking into account the recommendations of participants made during the *First Workshop*.



Objectives

More specifically, the *Second Workshop* sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- Present and discuss the experience of joint bodies in specific technical topics in transboundary water cooperation worldwide, to enable identification of challenges and good practices and mutual learning;
- Demonstrate the value of joint action in addressing common problems, and benefits of transboundary cooperation;
- Discuss how the work on joint bodies could be continued under the Convention in the new work plan (2016-2018), and identify gaps and needs to that end;
- Increase awareness on how the global legal frameworks, 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, relate to joint bodies and can support them.

Topics

The *Second Workshop* will focus mainly, but not only on the following topics, all to be looked at from the point of view of joint bodies and considering how the work under the Water Convention helps to address the challenges (the examples given are illustrative only):

- 1) Coordinating different water uses and accommodating them better: engaging with different economic sectors, agreeing on water allocation, seeking synergies and coherence, and reducing negative impacts: Show-casing examples of effective ways to promote inter-sectoral coordination — assessments, guidelines, decision-support systems, working arrangements, involving expertise etc.
- 2) Cooperation in the development and management of infrastructure, including constructed ones (dams, canals, sluices, irrigation systems etc.) and natural alternatives (e.g. wetlands). Related issues to be considered include, for example, negotiating about the trade-offs, innovative funding, sharing costs and benefits, defining operating rules, multiple use arrangements (flood protection, hydropower, navigation etc.),
- 3) Management of groundwater resources: While highlighting specificities of groundwater in transboundary cooperation (monitoring, resource estimation, pollution control etc.), under this theme integrated management of groundwater and surface water resources will be looked into, including identification of effective institutional and working arrangements, as well as conjunctive use.



- 4) Making environmental protection work: preservation and restoration of ecosystems, ecosystem services, setting targets and agreeing on environmental quality objectives; pollution control; harmonizing approaches; defining ecosystem requirements/environmental flows; outreach, cooperation and partnerships; monitoring (including effectiveness of measures etc.)
- 5) Selected challenges in the management of joint bodies: This theme is foreseen to focus on financing for operation (financial stability, economic instruments etc.), communication of benefits and results from work, and engaging with different stakeholders (from the political level to the general public).

Interested representatives of joint bodies are welcome to send proposals for presentations that are relevant to the topics to be discussed to the UNECE Water Convention secretariat, but the organizers will also invite directly specific contributions. Participants wanting to contribute to the programme this way should send a brief (e.g. half a page) description specifying how the presentation contributes to one of the themes from perspective of joint bodies and what relevant experience it will highlight by 20 February 2014 to Ms. Nataliya Nikiforova (nataliya.nikiforova@unece.org). Some contributions are foreseen to be presented in an inter-active small group format.

It is also foreseen that there will be a lunchtime side event on climate change adaptation in transboundary river basins, which draws upon the existing work area on this issue under the Water Convention.

A detailed programme will be issued in March 2014. The scoping of the themes will be adjusted to the selected programme contributions.

Partners and donors

The *Second 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 International Hydrological Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, Global Environment Facility's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network, German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) Transboundary water management in Central Asia Programme, Global Water Partnership, International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Network of Basin Organizations and the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

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



Organization of work and materials

The *Second Workshop* will be organized on 9 and 10 April 2014. The organization of work includes plenary sessions and discussions in break-out groups. There will also be a possibility to present tools or specific activities with replication potential in a highly inter-active presentation format.

A summary of the *First Workshop* as well as the documentation and presentations made at the workshop are available at:
http://www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_joint_bodies_2013.html

An informal document with reference material and publications on the topics of the *First Workshop* is available on the following website:
http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/meetings/joint_bodies/Reference_materials___selected_bibliography___fin.pdf

Participants are welcome to make available relevant material at the workshop.

The presentations made at the workshop will be available afterwards on the workshop's webpage.

Participation

Reflecting the global opening of the Water Convention^{*}, experts and practitioners from all over the world are invited to participate in the workshop 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.

For this *Second Workshop*, nominating institutions and organizations are recommended to take into account the themes defined for this workshop reflecting the feedback from the participants of the *First Workshop*, and nominate to attend individuals that are specifically responsible for substantive/technical tasks related to the themes.

^{*} The amendments allowing accession to the Convention to all United Nations Member States entered into force on 6 February 2013. The amendments are expected to become operational in the course of 2014.



Practical information and registration

The meeting will start at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 9 April 2014 and end at 5.30 p.m. on Thursday, 10 April 2014. 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 VII.

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience. Participants eligible for financial support should register **by 21 February 2014. 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 **28 March 2014.**

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

http://www.unece.org/env/water/joint_bodies_workshop_2014.html
and to transmit it to the UNECE secretariat either by e-mail (cammile.marcelo@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/joint_bodies_workshop_2014.html



Contact information

For organization of work and substantive enquiries (in English, French, Russian or Spanish):

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