



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/2
10 June 2008

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

**MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON
THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY
WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES**

Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

**REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT ON
ITS EIGHTH MEETING**

Introduction

1. The eight meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment was held in Helsinki, Finland, on 25–27 June 2007.
2. It was attended by representatives of the following countries: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
3. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization's Collaborating Centre for Groundwater Quality Assessment and Protection (hosted by the British Geological Survey), the secretariat of the International Sava River Basin Commission and of the NGO Women in Europe for a Common Future also attended the meeting.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL MATTERS

4. Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland), Chairperson of the Working Group, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

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5. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/1.
6. The Working Group adopted the report of its seventh meeting held in Geneva on 3-5 May 2006 (MP.WAT/WG.2/2006/2).

II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS IN THE UNECE REGION

7. The Chairperson recalled the steps taken to prepare the draft assessment of the status of transboundary waters in the UNECE region. She introduced briefly the documents that were prepared after the fourth meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/5 to ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/19) and invited participants to focus their comments on these documents. The secretariat brought to the attention of the Working Group the annex to document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/3 which contained the preliminary outline of the assessment and informed that in addition to the above mentioned documents, reference should be made to the relevant documents considered at the fourth meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/2006/16 and its addenda 1 to 6).

A. Preliminary assessments of transboundary groundwaters, lakes and rivers

8. Mr. John Chilton (British Geological Survey) and Mr. Peter Roncak (Slovakia) introduced the assessment of transboundary groundwaters in South Eastern Europe, and in Caucasus and Central Asia, respectively (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/18 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/19).¹ In general the status of the groundwaters was assessed as relatively good with few “hot spots”. It was noted that in both sub-regions groundwaters were highly vulnerable and that there was a high dependency on them for drinking water supply and for irrigation. In some cases, about 100% of drinking water was abstracted from groundwater. The following key issues were acknowledged as specific to the assessment of groundwaters: general lack of data and need for systematic monitoring and assessment, insufficient attention to groundwater management in political agendas, low level of transboundary cooperation, need for integrated water resource management (IWRM) and absence of a uniform technical guidance on monitoring and assessment.

9. Mr. Olli-Pekka Pietilainen (Finland) introduced the assessment of transboundary lakes (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/16, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/17 and ECE/MP.WAT/2006/16/Add.1). Unlike the assessment of groundwaters and rivers, the assessment of lakes was mostly based on official information found on the Internet rather than on submissions by countries. Time constrain was one of the major reason for that. In the lake assessment, hydromorphological situation and physico-chemical status were presented in a more complete way compared to information on pressure factors and management responses. Water quantity was a major concern for lakes used for hydropower purpose. The issues of

¹ Presentations made during the meeting are available at www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/documents_WGMA.htm.

eutrophication and of sediments received special attention and were recognised as relevant for the majority of lakes.

10. The Secretariat introduced the assessment of transboundary rivers (MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/5 to MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/15 and ECE/MP.WAT/2006/16/Add.2 to ECE/MP.WAT/2006/16/Add.6, accompanied by maps for some major river basins). It informed the Working Group about the missing contributions and gaps in the assessment, the comments received on the documents and how they would be taken into account. It also highlighted the major findings and the key challenges.

11. The assessment of transboundary rivers was mainly based on submissions by governments and, to a minor extent, on data from the relevant river basin commissions (joint bodies) and official assessment publications. Ecological status of rivers varied greatly throughout the region. Both water quality and quantity were issues of concern. In some cases high natural background levels contributed to the exceeding of maximum allowable concentration of some chemical determinants (for example in the Kura river basin and in the mountain parts of the rivers of Central Asia). Agriculture, hydropower production, mining, navigation, and in several places, tourism and population density, were among the main pressure factors. Morphological alterations were also highlighted as one of the major adverse pressure throughout the region. There were also some sub-regional trends, such as negative impact of obsolete waste water treatment plants or their absence in countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and in South-Eastern European (SEE).

12. The following key issues of concern were identified: absence of regular transboundary monitoring or exchange of assessment data for many water bodies; lack of harmonisation of methodologies and standards, discrepancy in data submitted by different riparian countries; conflict of interest - within and between countries - related to different water uses in upstream and downstream parts of basin. The need for implementation of IWRM was recognised as relevant for the entire region. The issues specific to countries with economies in transition were lack of systematic monitoring and assessment and low level of transboundary cooperation.

13. The Working Group provided a number of comments to the assessment of transboundary rivers that were reflected in the final publication.

B. Executive summary and conclusions of the assessment

14. The Secretariat introduced *the executive summary of the assessment and the conclusions of the assessment* (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/4; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/3, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/18, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2007/19 and ECE/MP.WAT/2006/16). The Working Group provided comments on the documents and requested that in addition to the main findings identified through the work on the assessment, the following issues should be reflected in the final documents: sediments, salinisation, eutrophication, pollution caused by aquaculture, solid wastes, pesticides, strategic role of groundwaters in water resource management, importance of payments for ecosystem services, allocation of water between different users, use of economic incentives, need for improving institutional, operational and legal frameworks and for strengthening human capacity.

15. The Working Group also discussed the political message for the category II document to be submitted to the Sixth Ministerial “Environment for Europe” Conference (10-12 October 2007, Belgrade)² and made arrangements for the organization of a side event on the assessment during the Ministerial Conference.

16. For what concerned the final text of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters, the Working Group decided that any additional comments to the documents, maps and list of names of contributors should be submitted to the secretariat by 6 July 2007 and it entrusted the Secretariat with the finalisation of the publication and its submission to the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”.³

17. The Working Group recognized with satisfaction that the results of the work on the assessment were far beyond the initial expectations. It underlined that despite some gaps in the data, the assessment provided a comprehensive overview of major problems and trends with respect to the status of surface and groundwaters across the region, the related pressure factors and management responses. The Working Group thanked the main authors, the different contributors and the secretariat, for the excellent work done and endorsed the assessment with the agreed changes.

C. Second edition of the assessment

18. The Working Group discussed future plans in relation to the preparation of the second assessment. It was suggested to have a clearer link with the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) and the possibility of the assessment to become in the long-term an European Water Development Report. The Working Group also stressed that in the second edition, the cooperation with the European Environment Agency should be further strengthened.

19. With regard to the content of the next assessment, it agreed that more emphasis should be given to the issues that were not adequately addressed in the first assessment. These included socio-economic aspects. It also recommended that the assessment of groundwaters should be incorporated into the assessment of the respective river basins or lakes, as appropriate.

20. The Working Group also considered that biological aspects should be further investigated in the second edition and that more information on quality of waters in Central Asia should be included, while for the rest of the region a stronger focus should be on quantity issues.

21. Furthermore, the Working Group raised the issue of the work arrangements and financial support. In this regard, it was recognized that timely availability of an additional staff member working on the assessment was a prerequisite for ensuring its effective preparation.

² The main findings of the assessment were submitted to the Belgrade Ministerial Conference in document ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/1 - ECE/ MP.WAT/23 available at <http://www.unece.org/env/efe/wgso/Belgrade/documents.html>.

³ The assessment has been published under the title “Our waters: joining hands across borders - first assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters” and is available at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub76.htm>.

22. The Working Group recognized the importance to cooperate with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management to further define the focus and format of the second edition of the assessment. It entrusted a core group lead by Finland to prepare for its next meeting a draft proposal on the arrangements related to the second assessment. The core group would be made of representatives from the following countries/organizations: Belarus, Belgium, Georgia, Greece, Slovakia, UNESCO and WWAP.

III. META-DATABASE ON THE TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS OF THE UNECE REGION

23. The Chairperson recalled the decision of the fourth meeting of the Parties related to the subject (ECE/MP.WAT/2006/17) and the relevant outcome of the Capacity for Water Cooperation (CWC) workshop on joint monitoring and assessment of shared water basins, including early warning and alarm systems (Tbilisi, Georgia, 31 October - 2 November 2005),⁴ where participants suggested establishing an interactive means of accessing information on the status of transboundary water bodies in the EECCA region, also including information on transboundary groundwaters.

24. Mr. Paul HAENER, International Office for Water, presented the example of the Water Information System for France (WISF). He illustrated the evolution in the 15 years since the establishment of the information system from a data network (data dictionaries, core datasets, data exchanges) to an architecture of services (geoservices, catalogue services, web services), allowing search, analysis, data presentation and download. He presented the WISF components, architecture and context within national and regional systems.

25. The Working Group stressed that the establishment of a ECE region-wide meta-database on water was an important issue. The Working Group recognized the importance of the database for the future editions of the assessment. At the same time, it agreed that there were a number of challenges. The main ones were: differences in criteria for dissemination of information to the public; availability of data in electronic form, accessibility of data through Internet. The situation regarding these three issues varied greatly within the region. Other important issues that needed to be taken into account were: quality of information, source of information and verification of information and moderation of the meta-database.

26. The Working Group requested the core group responsible for the proposal on the next assessment to also discuss the concept paper on the meta-database. The Working Group also requested the secretariat to explore whether France would be willing to take the lead in this activity and the development of the concept paper.⁵

IV. INTERNATIONAL WATER ASSESSMENT CENTRE (IWAC)

27. Mr. Peter Roncak (Slovakia) informed the Working Group on how Slovakia was following up its offer made at the fourth meeting of the Parties to host IWAC at the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute. He confirmed that IWAC transfer to the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute would be completed by the end of 2008.

⁴ See http://www.unece.org/env/water/cwc/monit_assess.htm.

⁵ After the meeting, the International Office for Water agreed to take the leadership of this activity.

28. The following sources of financial support to IWAC activities were foreseen: budget of the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, budget of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. IWAC should also aim at raising funds from the European Commission. It was Slovakia's intention to consolidate IWAC support of ongoing and new pilot projects. Mr. Roncak stressed that strong commitment from participating countries and evidences of sustainability of projects would be a precondition for any activity.

29. Mr. Roncak also informed that a memorandum of understanding between ECE and the Ministry of Environment of Slovakia on cooperation on IWAC should be signed.

30. The Working Group thanked Slovakia for its kind offer and expressed its hope for the effective functioning of IWAC, as a supportive instrument for the Convention implementation in the whole region.

V. PILOT PROGRAMME ON MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

A. Pilot projects on transboundary rivers

31. Ukraine informed that the TACIS project on Latorica/Latoritza-Uh/Uzh was completed and, regretfully, there was no foreseen follow-up to the project. This was mainly due to the lack of financial funds from external donors.

32. The Secretary of the International Sava River Basin Commission informed that he would prepare a proposal on a possible new pilot project in the Sava River Basin for consideration and the next meeting of the Working Group.

B. Pilot projects on transboundary groundwaters

33. UNESCO informed that it would support the publishing of the final report of the Aggtelek-Slovak Karst groundwater pilot project. The report would be presented to the Slovak-Hungarian Transboundary Commission, together with a proposal to extend the pilot project to other groundwater bodies shared by the two countries.

34. Belarus informed that, regretfully, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project "Bug SUMTAS (Sustainable Use of the Mesozoic Transboundary Aquifer System)" did not include a Bug groundwater pilot project as submitted by Belarus, Poland and Ukraine.

35. The Working Group recommended that in future pilot projects on groundwaters and surface waters should be implemented in a coordinated way.

C. Pilot projects on transboundary/international lakes

36. Finland informed that there was no progress made in the Peipsi pilot project mainly due to the lack of interest from the Russian Federation. It suggested terminating the project.

37. Georgia and Azerbaijan confirmed their interest in the pilot project on the Jandar Lake and agreed to prepare a detailed proposal for the next meeting of the Working Group.

VI. TECHNICAL GUIDANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

38. The Netherlands presented an inventory of technical guidelines available on-line on the IWAC website (see <http://www.iwac-riza.org/>). It encouraged the Working Group to discuss ways and means for the continuation of this activity.

39. The Chairperson informed that there were no proposals for the development of new technical guidelines. The Working Group agreed that priority should be given to support the implementation of the Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters, rather than to the development of a new technical document.

40. The Secretariat recalled the element in the workplan of the Working Group adopted at the fourth meeting of the Parties related to capacity building and invited the Working Group to discuss possible future activities with a special focus on countries in EECCA and in SEE.

41. The Secretariat also noted that the EU Water Framework Directive requested EU countries to set up monitoring programmes by December 2006 and to report to the European Commission on their monitoring programmes in 2007. That provided an opportunity to promote the exchange of experience among EU countries on joint monitoring and assessment programmes developed in accordance with the EU WFD and promote the lessons learned in non-EU countries.

42. The Secretariat also informed the Working Group about the upcoming workshop on river basin commissions and other institutions for transboundary water cooperation that would take place in Almaty, from 23 to 25 October 2007, within the CWC project.⁶

43. The Secretariat also introduced the activities carried out under the National Policy Dialogues (NPD) programme of the EECCA component of the EU Water Initiative. NPDs programme were carried out in Armenia and Moldova (projected lifetime 2007-2009). From 2008 onwards, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine would also be included.

44. The Working Group took note of the report and stressed that the NPDs were a useful framework to implement at national level the Convention and its tools; at the same time they would provide an important feed-back on the usefulness of the activities and tools under the Convention and to identify future priority areas of work.

VII. ASSISTANCE TO PARTIES TO THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH ON ISSUES RELATED TO TARGET SETTING, INDICATORS AND REPORTING

45. The Secretariat informed the Working Group about the plans under the programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health in relation to the development of targets, indicators

⁶ See http://www.unece.org/env/water/cwc/joint_bodies.htm.

and reporting guidelines. A Task Force on Indicators and Reporting, lead by Switzerland, would hold its first meeting in March 2008. Prior to this meeting a Core group of experts would meet to prepare a first draft proposal for consideration by the Task Force. The Secretariat stressed the need for close cooperation on this issue between the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health and encouraged Governments to take part in the activities of the Task Force on Indicators and Reporting.⁷

VIII. EARLY WARNING AND CONTINGENCY PLANS IN CASE OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

46. The Secretariat informed the Working Group about the plans under the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents to develop guidelines and good practices for tailing dams and a guidance for establishing cross-border contingency plans in case of industrial accidents. With regard to the tailing dams issue, the workshop on the Safety of Tailing Management Facilities was scheduled to take place in November 2007 in Armenia.⁸ The workshop would allow exchanging experience and good practice on the prevention, control and reduction of tailing dam failure and for providing comments on the draft guidelines and good practices for tailing dams.

47. The Secretariat stressed that the work under the Joint Expert Group was lacking the needed expertise from the water sector and invited Governments to take part in its future meetings.

IX. WORKPLAN FOR 2007–2009

48. The Chairperson introduced the excerpt from the workplan (see informal document WGMA/2007/1) relevant to the Working Group's work, as adopted by the Parties at their fourth meeting. The Group agreed that there was no need to propose any amendment to the workplan at the moment and agreed to review it, as appropriate, at its next meeting.

X. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

49. The Working Group re-elected Ms. Lea Kauppi and Ms. Zsuzsanna Buzas as Chairperson and Vice-chairperson, respectively.

XI. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

50. The Working Group tentatively agreed to meet in mid June 2008 in Geneva.

⁷ Information on the Task Force on Indicators and Reporting is available at:
http://www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/documents_TFIR.htm

⁸ See <http://www.unece.org/env/teia/water/tailingdams/yerevan-document.htm>.