

NOTES, NEWS & COMMENTS

Proposed World Water Council

Origins

Concrete steps to establish a World Water Council were taken at a meeting of a founding committee on 31 March–1 April 1995 in Montreal, Canada. Building on discussions growing out of the 1994 Dublin Conference and the most recent International Water Resources Association (IWRA) World Congress, a draft statement of objectives and mode of operation was prepared and is now being circulated for comments and to chart more definitive action in September 1995.

The background for the effort was canvassed at a special plenary session at the IWRA (organized by Brian Grover of the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA] and Guy Le Moigne of the World Bank) Congress in Cairo, Egypt, in late November 1994. The papers from the review are being published in the *International Journal of Water Resources Development* as edited by Asit K. Biswas (Biswas *et al.*, in prep.). They examine the needs within and without the United Nations system since the Mar del Plata Conference of 1977,* and appraise a variety of possible actions — including the suitability of the model of the World Energy Council, now based in the United Kingdom.

Those reviews were supplemented by statements from representatives of the Bahrain Ministry of Works, Power & Water, the International Water Supply Association, the International Association for Hydraulic Research, the International Association on Water Quality, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council. Reference was also made to encouragement from the Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation, held in The Netherlands in March 1994.

Exploratory Committee Appointed

The IWRA appointed a special committee to explore the idea further under the chairmanship of Dr Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, Senior Under-Secretary of State and head of the National Water Research Center in Egypt. He chaired the inaugural meeting of the Founding Committee in Montreal. That group included, in addition to IWRA, members from CIDA, the Global Water Policy Project, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, Stockholm Environment Institute, the Uganda Directorate of Water Development, the UN Development Programme, the World

* See the account by Dr E. Barton Worthington which we published in our Summer issue of the same year (*Environmental Conservation*, 4[2], pp. 153–4, 1977).

Bank water sanitation, and environmentally sustainable development, programmes, the World Health Organization, Wuhan University of Hydraulic and Electric Engineering, and the World Conservation Union.

The Founding Committee that developed from the above exploratory committee produced a 'Montreal Initiative' that specifies strategic considerations, missions, objectives, scope of activities, membership, governance, financing, and implementation arrangements. (Copies of the Montreal Initiative may be obtained from Ken Lum, IUCN–The World Conservation Union, 38° Rue St Antoine, Montreal, PQ H2X 3K7, Canada, or Glenn E. Stout, IWRA, 1101 West Peabody Drive, Urbana, Illinois 61801-4723, USA.)

In brief, the World Water Council as proposed is to be non-profit, non-governmental, and non-political. It is not to duplicate existing organizations, and is to provide an independent, neutral, participatory forum to cover global water issues — so as to facilitate management and use of water on an environmentally sustainable basis for the benefit of all people.

Details of who will be the principal stakeholders and how they will interact in management are being examined carefully, and will be the subject of a meeting of the Interim Founding Committee at Bari, Italy, on 17–18 September 1995. Clearly it is important that the first membership be representative of all major interests, and that the first activities be significant and practicable.

The Montreal International Conference Centre Corporation has offered to provide partial support for an interim period of five years, and other potential funding sources are being explored. Steps are being taken to establish an Interim Board of Governors, selected from among founding stakeholders.

For the first time since hopes were raised at Mar del Plata in 1977, it seems likely that the world will soon have an organization that is capable of bringing together and mobilizing all groups — governmental and non-governmental — concerned with environmentally sound management of water.

REFERENCE

BISWAS, A.K., MAGEED, Y.A., & WHITE, G.F., CHITALE, M.A., GROVER, B. & JEFFERSON, M. (in prep.). Papers on World Water Council. *International Journal of Water Resources Development*.

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Increasing Land Scarcity Poses Threat of Food Shortage

With the world's human population growing very much faster than its cultivated land area (Fig. 1), the food security of hundreds of millions of people may be at risk early in the next century, according to a new report by Population Action International (PAI).

In the early 1960s, only four countries — Kuwait, Singapore, Oman, and Japan — had insufficient arable land to feed their populations without highly intensive agriculture, but they were wealthy enough either to import food or to increase agricultural productivity with modern farming

methods. By 1990, the number of countries with scarcity of arable land had risen to nine, and included The Netherlands, South Korea, and Egypt. By AD 2025, however, at least 17 additional countries are projected to join the ranks of countries suffering from a scarcity of arable land, among them some of the world's poorest nations: Somalia, Bangladesh, Kenya, Mauritania, and Yemen.

The new study, *Conserving Land: Population and Sustainable Food Production*, employs a benchmark of land scarcity conservatively set at 0.07 hectare of arable land