

Informal Inter-American Water Policy Roundtable

Thursday, October 21, 1999 8:30 – 10:00 am
Organization of American States
Washington, DC

MINUTES

24 participants -- participant list attached

Jorge Rucks, Director of Division II of the OAS Unit for Sustainable Development and Environment, welcomed participants and gave a brief introduction. Eric Dannenmaier, Director of the North-South Center Environmental Law Program, explained the dynamics of the roundtable and introduced Sasha Gottlieb, staff member of the OAS Inter-American Water Resources Network (IWRN).

Agenda Item 1: IWRN Briefing

Sasha Gottlieb gave a presentation on the IWRN, explaining that its purpose is to be a network of networks regarding water issues in the Americas. She spoke about the Inter-American Dialogues on Water Management that have been held in Miami in 1993, in Buenos Aires in 1996 and in Panama in 1999. The next dialog is to be held in Brazil in 2000. She also explained the current "Water Vision of the Americas" project that is underway. Water Visions for South America, Central America, the Caribbean, Canada, and Mexico have already been drafted. The Nature Conservancy and the Water Environment Foundation is hosting a meeting (Nov. 8th and 9th) to formulate a Water Vision for the United States. Nov. 17th and 18th, the IWRN and the OAS will host the Water Vision of the Americas Workshop to integrate the various regional Visions into a hemispheric Vision.

Agenda Item 2: USAID Briefing

Morris Israel presented a brief summary of US Agency for International Development activities for FY2000. Below is a synopsis of his remarks:

1. The main work has to do with the hurricane Mitch aftermath. US Congress has allocated \$600 million for reconstruction activities (sanitation, water shed). Honduras and Nicaragua are the primary recipient countries. This money is 2-year money, i.e. it has to be spent in 2 years, not merely allocated or obligated.
2. Another important activity is related to transboundary watershed issues. USAID is working with CCAD, the Comité Regional de Recursos Hidráulicos, NOAA and IDB on this Central America regional project (\$4 m./2 year project).
3. USAID has also allocated \$10 m. for Nicaragua for projects related to sanitation working through local NGOs.

Morris explained the importance of the sustainability component of USAID's work, emphasizing economic efficiency, decentralization of services (technical assistance, regional analysis, regional workshop), water sanitation and clean production. He highlighted the issues of monitoring/forecasting, and watersheds conservation.

USAID is planning a regional workshop to wrap up the whole activity bringing different sectors together to discuss issues. Two important themes are:

- Economic efficiency in water sanitation and environmental issues
- Clean Production, energy other project activities they try to continue more

In addition, USAID has several important mission programs, overseen by the bilateral missions in the region. In Panama, for example, USAID is helping to prepare for the change of the canal to new authorities. The canal commission is working on the importance of watersheds.

After Morris's presentation, some of the participants discussed the importance of decentralization and the problems of municipalities involved in this process. They also spoke about privatization as an option in order to decentralize services in regions and municipalities.

On the subject of decentralization, Eric Dannenmaier pointed out the organization of a Central America regional workshop on sustainable urban environmental management, to be held by the North-South Center Environmental Law Program in conjunction with USAID and CCAD in El Salvador in mid November. He distributed a copy of the agenda for the El Salvador workshop and invited interested parties to contact Maria Junco Estebán, ELP staff attorney, for more information. Eric also distributed a copy of a report from a South America workshop on the Gran Chaco del Sur, which is another important region where water issues must be addressed..

Agenda Item 3: Water law database project

Eric Dannenmaier gave a brief introduction to FIDA (Inter-American Forum on Environmental Law), a new inter-American network of officials and experts on environmental law that is being established by the OAS pursuant to a Bolivia Summit agreement. One of the first thematic areas of emphasis for FIDA will be water policy. In connection with that theme, FIDA is working with IWRN and others to compile an internet-accessible water law database for the Americas. The database will offer full text of key water-related laws from countries in the region, and will complement other efforts to build regional databases on environmental law, such as the E-LINE project of the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), and the regional component of the Pace University Environmental Law Database. Participants commented on the structure of the proposed database, and offered suggestions that will be incorporated into the project. A further report will be provided in the future.

Agenda Item 4: Future meeting agendas

Participants discussed the importance of continuing the informal dialog on a monthly basis, and reviewed possible themes that might be addressed. There was a sense of the meeting that future discussion can be focused on substantive thematic areas in addition to providing updates on the specific activities of relevant institutions. Participants offered the following list of possible topics that may be discussed in future roundtables:

- Irrigation
- Riparian rights and tenure
- Navigation
- Groundwater
- Aquaculture
- Coastal water
- 1997 UN Convention on Non-navigational Uses of Transboundary Water Courses
- Privatization/ decentralization
- Watershed – ecosystem approaches
- Financing
- RAMSAR Convention
- Land use planning and water rights
- European Conventions
- Sustainability/financing

Other Business -- Additional Information

Some participants gave internet sites that may be consulted for further information on water issues:

<http://iwrn.ces.fav.edu> (electronic discussion groups)
www.atervision.org
www.waterweb.org
www.summit-americas.org (research for next meeting)

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held on Thursday, November 18, 1999 in the Padilla Vidal meeting room, at the OAS, 1889 F St. NW. On the agenda will be Salman Salman, from the World Bank, to discuss the Bank's recent work on water policy. In addition, the group will focus on the 1997 UN Convention on Non-navigational Uses of Transboundary Water Courses, and discuss its prospects for ratification in the Americas.

The Summit of the Americas Information Network



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