



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

MP.WAT/WG.4/2001/2  
EUR/ICP/5025519/B/2

29 August 2001  
ENGLISH ONLY

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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE**

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

**Working Group on Water and Health**

**REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING**

**held at Budapest from 14 to 15 May 2001  
at the invitation of the Government of Hungary**

**Introduction**

1. The first meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health, established under the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health, took place in Budapest on 14-15 May 2001 at the invitation of the Government of Hungary.
2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

3. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO/EURO), which carry out the secretariat functions for the Protocol on Water and Health, and by a representative of the WHO/EURO Project Office Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan.

4. Representatives of the non-governmental organization MAMA-86 and of Lakes Environmental Software (Canada) also participated.

## **I. PROCEDURES**

5. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document MP.WAT/WG.4/2001/1 - EUR/ICP/5025519/B/1.

6. The meeting of the Working Group was chaired by Mr. Alan PINTER, Chairman of the Meeting of the Signatories to the Protocol on Water and Health.

## **II. PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH**

### **A. Surveillance, early-warning and notification systems**

7. Based on a note by Hungary, the Signatories to the Protocol agreed at their first meeting on the drawing-up of guidelines on surveillance, early-warning and notification systems (programme element 4.1.1). The lead country for this activity, Hungary, informed the Working Group about the further elaboration of this guidance document. The Working Group requested the lead country together with experts from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to further elaborate the document taking into account new issues such as legionellosis, cryptosporidiosis, problems of bio-films in distribution networks, and characteristics of the monitoring systems. Notwithstanding the limitations of the current surveillance systems, the Working Group noted that some information on water-related diseases was available at the national level.

8. The Working Group:

(a) Agreed that the current draft guidance documents on surveillance of water-related diseases should be made accessible on a restricted-access web site hosted by the World Health Organization's European Centre on Environment and Health (WHO/ECEH) in Rome;

(b) Invited the Hungarian National Institute for Environmental Health to organize in the course of 2001 a technical workshop on surveillance of water-related diseases to further develop the guidelines.

#### B. Assessing health risks

9. The Working Group examined the progress made under programme element 4.1.2 on rapid environmental and health risk assessment (REHRA) with Italy as lead country and the pilot application of the draft methodology in the lower Danube basin. It recognized the need for rapid assessments of environmental and health risks of a great number of industrial enterprises in other river basins, for example, the Tobol and Don basins, but noted that the methodology is still needed to be further elaborated before it could be applied to other regions.

10. The Working Group took also note of a presentation on specialized software for the assessment of environmental and health risks developed by the Canadian firm "Lakes Environmental Software", and on potential future cooperation with Canada in this area.

11. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress made on the proposed REHRA methodology and the further steps to test and finalize it;

(b) Invited the lead country (Italy) to present the final version of REHRA at its second meeting of for examination;

(c) Requested the WHO/EURO representative of the joint secretariat to explore possible applications of specialized software assessment techniques in other appropriate locations, such as the Caspian region, and assume a coordinating role in this regard.

#### C. Arrangements for preparing an evidence base under the Protocol

12. The joint secretariat informed the Working Group about current reporting schemes in countries with different socio-economic conditions. This report, prepared by a consultant to WHO/ECEH, indicated that the review of data so gathered could provide a more refined picture of the current status of water-related diseases in Europe. One country recalled the obligation of Member States of the European Union under the standardized reporting directive, deplored the delays in the implementation of this directive and urged the optimal use of existing data rather than new data-gathering. The Working Group agreed that there was a need to review existing reporting schemes, study their potential optimization in line with the requirements of the

Protocol on Water and Health and formulate guidelines on the further development or optimization of reporting schemes.

13. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the offer of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication, established in Germany at Bonn University, to take the lead in organizing an expert consultation on the development of a reporting scheme for water-related diseases during the last week of October 2001 at Bonn University;

(b) Welcomed the readiness of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Slovenia and the United Kingdom to participate in this activity.

D. Arrangements for preparing a reporting scheme under the Protocol

14. The Working Group noted the readiness of the lead country for this activity (United Kingdom) to re-assume work on a draft guidance document on a reporting regime (programme element 4.2.2), which had to be postponed after the first meeting of the Signatories to the Protocol on Water and Health due to unforeseeable changes in the responsibilities of United Kingdom experts.

E. Arrangements for a compliance review regime

15. The Working Group took note of the information by the joint secretariat on work already undertaken under the auspices of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention to draw up a non-confrontational and non-judicial compliance regime (see the documents of the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention, MP.WAT/2000/4, 5 and Add.1), and on arrangements made with the Working Group on Legal and Administrative Aspects, established under the Convention, to assist in the implementation of programme element 4.2.1.

16. The Working Group on Water and Health:

(a) Invited the joint secretariat to prepare a note regarding the drawing-up of the first element of a compliance review regime, i.e. the establishment of a baseline and system for review, for consideration at the second meeting of the Working Group;

(b) Invited the Working Group on Legal and Administrative Aspects to jointly develop the second and third elements of the compliance regime (i.e. establishing the compliance review procedure and the institutional mechanism) in the course of 2002.

F. Workshop on sustainable water management and health

17. The lead country (Russian Federation) informed the Working Group on the preparations for the Fourth International Congress and Trade Fair ECWATECH-2002 (Moscow, June 2002) in general, and on the preparations for the workshop on sustainable water management and health, in particular (programme element 4.1.4). Possible themes of the workshop that still needed to be elaborated included: surveillance, early-warning and notification systems; assessment of health risks; and preparation of an evidence base and reporting scheme under the Protocol. Topics for discussion would also include the involvement of NGOs in the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol on Water and Health, particularly in the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

18. The Working Group:

(a) Invited the UNECE representative of the joint secretariat to act as focal point for the further preparations for the workshop;

(b) Invited its officers to assist the lead country and the joint secretariat in the further preparations for the workshop and in the wide dissemination of information, both on the workshop and on ECWATECH-2002;

(c) Proposed to the lead country to consider convening the workshop as a two-day event.

G. Guidance on modalities for the participation of competent international non-governmental organizations

19. The Working Group reviewed with appreciation the participation of members of the NGO community in the work under the Protocol on Water and Health, and agreed that activities under the Protocol could also profit from the participation of representatives of the water industry and other professional organizations.

20. The Working Group:

(a) Requested the joint secretariat to draw up a discussion paper regarding the participation of NGOs and professional organizations in activities under the Protocol on Water and Health for examination at its second meeting;

(b) Welcomed the offer of the NGO “MAMA-86” to contribute to the drafting of this discussion paper by submitting a note to the joint secretariat by the end of 2001 at the latest.

#### H. Facilitating access to sources of finance

21. The Working Group took note of a lecture of the representative of the WHO/EURO Project Office Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan on activities carried out under this action plan and access to source of finance. The Working Group also considered other financing modalities for small-, medium-, and large-scale projects. In general, the participants were of the opinion that information on criteria and obligatory formats for funding requests was difficult to access, and support was urgently required.

22. The Working Group:

(a) Requested the joint secretariat to set up a web site under the Protocol on Water and Health to provide links to information on funding mechanisms (e.g. Global Environment Facility, TACIS of the European Union, and assistance programmes at the pan-European level such as the Project Preparation Committee (PPC) established under the “Environment for Europe” process) and major information sources (e.g. guidebooks);

(b) Agreed to provide additional information to the secretariat once a preliminary web site was established rather than set up an ad hoc expert group as was foreseen under programme element 4.1.3.

### III. LINKS TO OTHER ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

#### A. Follow-up to, and participation in, other relevant activities under the Convention

23. The joint secretariat informed the Working Group about the other relevant activities undertaken under the Convention, in particular: (a) the workshop on public participation in water management (Netherlands, 18 September 2001); (b) the international workshop and exercise: industrial safety and water protection in transboundary river basins (Tiszaujvaros, Hungary, 3-5 October 2001); (c) the workshop on approaches and tools for river basin management: experience drawn from the implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (Bratislava, 15-16 October 2001); (d) the workshop on the protection of groundwaters used as a source of drinking-water supply (Budapest, 8-10 November 2001); and (e) the second international conference on sustainable management of transboundary waters in Europe (Miedzyzdroje, Poland, 21-24 April 2002).

24. The Working Group:

- (a) Took note of the information by the joint secretariat;
- (b) Invited its members to prepare contributions to these events.

B. Follow-up to the meetings of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC)

25. The joint secretariat informed the Working Group about relevant activities undertaken under EEHC auspices, including a possible study on the implementation of the precautionary principle as a potential topic for the European environment and health process, and the drawing-up of a communication strategy for EEHC. The Working Group took also note of the preparations for the Ministerial Conference on Water and Health (Budapest, 2004).

26. The joint secretariat made a computer presentation of the special web site of the Protocol on Water and Health created by WHO/ECEH on the occasion of the 2001 United Nations World Day for Water. It also circulated among the participants a draft brochure on the Protocol on Water and Health prepared as part of the EEHC communication strategy.

27. The Working Group:

- (a) Recommended to EEHC that a special session on water and health should be included in the draft provisional agenda of the 2004 Ministerial Conference;
- (b) Invited participants to provide the joint secretariat with examples of the application of the precautionary principle, as defined in the Protocol on Water and Health, within national or transboundary contexts, and invited the joint secretariat to prepare a note on the basis of these replies for consideration at its second meeting;
- (c) Invited the participants to examine the draft brochure on the Protocol and communicate amendments and additions, if any, to the joint secretariat by the end of May 2001;
- (d) Appreciated the offer of UNECE to translate the brochure on the Protocol into French and Russian, and invited countries to examine the possibility of providing translations into other national languages;
- (e) Expressed its utmost interest in the creation of a specialized web site on the Protocol that would expand the web site of the Convention and provide specific scientific and technical information on activities under the Protocol, official documents, and links to other relevant sites;

(f) Invited WHO/ECEH to develop, host and manage this special web site in close collaboration with UNECE.

C. Assessment of achievements under chapter 18 of Agenda 21

28. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the current draft report on the European input into the assessment of achievements since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (see “World Summit on Sustainable Development” at [www.unece.org/env](http://www.unece.org/env));

(b) Took note of the activities of the United Nations organizations regarding the International Conference on Freshwater (see [www.water-2001.de](http://www.water-2001.de)), scheduled to take place in Bonn, Germany, on 3-7 December 2001.

D. Links to the 1988 Aarhus Protocol on Persistent Organic Substances (POPs) and the forthcoming global convention on POPs

29. The Working Group took note of the information by the joint secretariat on: (a) the links between the 1988 Aarhus Protocol on Persistent Organic Substances to the 1979 UNECE Convention on the Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and the forthcoming Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; (b) the priorities set under both instruments for Europe and Central Asia; and (c) possible financing mechanisms. The Working Group particularly noted the relevance of the financing mechanisms created by the Global Environment Facility for the activities under the Protocol on Water and Health, and invited the joint secretariat to provide support to individual countries in the region in their efforts to obtain financing.

#### IV. WORK PLAN

30. The Working Group examined and updated its work plan (see annex); and noted that these amendments were subject to approval by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention.

#### V. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

31. The Working Group elected Mr. Alan PINTER (Hungary) as its Chairman, and Mr. Valery KUKOSH (Russian Federation) and Mr. Steve LEE-BAPTY (United Kingdom) as its



Vice-Chairmen. They will act as the Working Group's officers until the end of its second meeting in 2002.

## **VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

32. The Working Group entrusted its officers with the finalization of the report on the basis of a draft to be prepared by the joint secretariat.

Annex

**WORK PLAN UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH**

Revised by the Working Group on Water and Health on 15 May 2001 a/

Responsible body: Working Group on Water and Health, with Hungary as lead Party.

Rationale: The focus of the programme area on water and human health is on the interim implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health pending its entry into force. The activities will promote sustainable water supply and management in cities and rural areas, the rehabilitation of defective water-supply and sewage systems, and the minimization of the adverse impact of human activities (e.g. waste-water discharges, water resources development projects) on human health and safety. The programme area also aims at reducing health problems and diseases due to poor water quality. Soft-law instruments and methodologies will be developed. Human resources development and institutional capacity building, for example through workshops, training courses and pilot programmes or projects, are also foreseen. The work-plan elements included in this programme area were updated in the light of the decisions taken by the Signatories to the Protocol at their first meeting (Budapest, 2-3 November 2000).

Main partners: UNECE, WHO/EURO, UNEP, UNDP, European Commission, European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) and relevant NGOs.

**4.1 Protocol on Water and Health: interim implementation**

Objectives: The Parties to the Convention and the Signatories to the Protocol on Water and Health will implement relevant provisions of the Protocol pending its entry into force. The International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC) established under the Convention will assist, as appropriate, in the implementation of the programme element.

Work accomplished: Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, adopted in London on 17 June 1999. Conference on sustainable water management and health, held during the Fourth International Congress and Trade Fair "ECWATECH-2000" (Moscow, 1 June 2000).

#### **4.1.1 Surveillance, early-warning and notification systems**

Work to be undertaken: Based on the outcome of the discussion of the Signatories at their first meeting, the Working Group on Water and Health will draw up draft guidelines on good practices in national and international surveillance, early-warning and notification systems for consideration by the Parties to the Protocol at their first meeting. *These guidelines will include the newly recognized problems of legionellosis, cryptosporidiosis and bio-films in distribution networks, and will make reference to the characteristics of the monitoring systems.*

Lead Party/Signatory: Hungary. [b/](#)

#### **4.1.2 Assessing health risks to be addressed under the Protocol**

Work to be undertaken: Based on the outcome of the discussion of the Signatories at their first meeting, the Working Group on Water and Health will draw up draft guidelines on assessing health risks from chemical, microbiological and physical (floods) sources for consideration by the Parties to the Protocol at their first meeting. *As a first step, a method for rapid environmental and health risk assessment (REHRA) will be drawn up and tested in the lower Danube basin.*

Lead Party/Signatory: Italy.

#### **4.1.3 Facilitating access to sources of finance, through improving the formulation of programmes and projects**

Work to be undertaken: The Working Group on Water and Health will examine ways and means of accessing and disseminating information on sources of finance (e.g. inventory of information sources under which donor organizations publish projects of relevance to the Protocol; liaison with the Project Preparation Committee (PPC) established under the “Environment for Europe” process. *The joint secretariat will set up a specific web site aimed at facilitating access to sources of finance.*

Lead Party/Signatory: None. *To be implemented by the joint secretariat with inputs from the Signatories to the Protocol on Water and Health.*

#### **4.1.4 Workshops on sustainable water management and health**

Work to be undertaken: Preparation and development of international workshops and other events, including the ECWATECH-2002 Conference on sustainable water management and health, and preparation of follow-up activities for consideration by the Bureau.

Lead Party/Signatory: Russian Federation for the Conference to be held on the occasion of ECWATECH-2002.

#### **4.2 Preparations for the first meeting of the Parties**

Objectives: The Parties to the Convention and the Signatories to the Protocol on Water and Health will prepare the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

Work accomplished: Geneva Strategy and Framework for Monitoring Compliance with Agreements on Transboundary Waters (MP.WAT/2000/4, 5 and Add.1).

##### **4.2.1 Arrangements for the preparation of meeting documents on compliance review**

Work to be undertaken: The Working Group on Water and Health assisted by the Working Group on Legal and Administrative Aspects will draw up multilateral arrangements of a non-confrontational, non-judicial and consultative nature for reviewing compliance with the provisions of the Protocol for consideration by the Parties to the Protocol at their first meeting. Use will be made, as appropriate, of the work undertaken by a group of invited experts (led by the Netherlands and assisted by the UNECE secretariat and the UNEP Regional Office for Europe) who have drawn up the Geneva Strategy and Framework for Monitoring Compliance with Agreements on Transboundary Waters (MP.WAT/2000/4, 5 and Add.1).

Lead Party/Signatory: Hungary.

##### **4.2.2 Arrangements for the preparation of an evidence base under the Protocol and of guidelines on reporting**

Work to be undertaken: Article 16, paragraph 3 (b), of the Protocol requests the Parties to evaluate progress in implementing the Protocol on the basis of information provided by the Parties in accordance with guidelines established by the Meeting of the Parties. Such guidelines shall avoid duplication of effort in reporting requirements. *The Working Group on Water and Health will:*

(a) *Draw up a draft guidance document on reporting following the relevant provisions of the Protocol, particularly those of articles 6 and 7. The United Kingdom will act as lead Party;*

(b) *Examine the possibility of developing a reporting scheme for water-related diseases. The WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication will provide its expertise.*

Lead Party/Signatory: *United Kingdom for the activity under (a). The joint secretariat in cooperation with the WHO Collaborating Centre and interested Parties/Signatories for the activity under (b).*

#### **4.2.3 Arrangements for the preparation of other meeting documents**

Work to be undertaken: On the basis of drafts to be prepared by the joint secretariat, the Working Group on Water and Health will finalize the following documents for consideration by the Parties to the Protocol at their first meeting: (a) draft rules of procedure for the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol; (b) draft guidance document on modalities for the participation of competent international governmental and non-governmental bodies in all meetings and other activities pertinent to the achievement of the purposes of the Protocol (art. 16, para. 3 (f)); (c) draft guidance document on priority of work under the Protocol; and (d) a draft declaration of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. Other meeting documents will be drawn up, if need be.

Lead Party/Signatory: None. To be implemented by the joint secretariat with the assistance of the Chairperson of the Working Group on Legal and Administrative Aspects (Greece) and the Chairperson of the Working Group on Water and Health (Hungary).

#### Notes:

a/ Amendments to the work plan adopted by the Signatories to the Protocol at their first meeting are given in italics. After approval by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, this work plan will become part of work to be carried out under programme area IV "Water and Human Health" of the 2000-2003 work plan.

b/ In line with the other parts of the 2000-2003 work plan under the Convention, reference is made to a lead country (which is either a Party to the Convention or a Signatory to the Protocol). At their first meeting, the Signatories agreed, however, that countries that took over responsibility under the programme elements in programme area IV were acting as "driving forces" rather than lead countries.

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