

networking water resource management

“By improving the knowledge transfer amongst stakeholders in charge of Integrated Water Resources Management, IWRM.Net will enable us to work on synergies between research needs and policy.”

Water is the key to life, and the European Union recognises this through its Water Framework Directive.

The Directive is an all-encompassing attempt to protect and manage Europe's water resources in a sustainable way. However, its integration into national legislation has presented policy-makers and water resource managers with a new set of research challenges. Now, an ERA-NET project called IWRM.Net – Towards a European-wide exchange Network for research efforts on Integrated Water Resources Management – is looking to establish lasting relationships that will boost the impact of R&D in this sector.

The EU's Water Framework Directive, which was adopted in December 2000, lays down a variety of objectives to be achieved by 2015. The aim is to improve the quality of surface, ground and coastal waters – and to safeguard the continent's precious water-based eco-systems. The Directive includes measures to strengthen water resource management and to tackle pollution and harmful emissions. However, it has brought with it a new set of research needs that must be addressed by the likes of water resource managers and regulatory bodies. For example, the legislation requires the development of a new set of biological reference conditions for different water types. What is more, the Directive's all-embracing nature brings new research demands in areas such as economics, resource monitoring, water governance, pollution control, etc. All of this will impact on the myriad of European, national and regional research programmes that relate to water resources management.

Groundwork

This ERA-NET project has detailed work packages to ensure it fulfils its objectives. The project harnesses the work of a smaller ERA-NET initiative (a Specific Support Action – SSA) which examined the feasibility of developing a network at European level. The SSA carried out a study in 13 countries, analysing 60 national- and government-funded research programmes. The study revealed that the Water Framework Directive was indeed having a significant effect on the content and direction of these programmes, and pointed to the need for a more consistent, long-term scientific approach to integrated water resources management. IWRM.Net brings together 17 partners from 14 countries – plus a number of observers. The project aims to develop into a networking tool for national and regional research programmes which will help managers to improve their working methods through exchanging good practice and by developing new shared methods and tools.



Coordination Action IWRM.NET

Full title:

Towards a Europe-wide exchange Network for integrating research efforts on Integrated Water Resources Management

Research field:

Integrated Water Resources Management

Co-ordinator:

France: Office International de l'Eau

Partners:

- Germany: Programme Management Organisation Research Centre Karlsruhe
- Austria: Umweltbundesamt
- United Kingdom: Scotland & Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research
- France: Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement Durable
- The Netherlands: Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management, Institute for Inland Water Management and Waste Water Treatment
- United Kingdom: Environment Agency of England and Wales
- Belgium: Centre Environnement – University of Liège
- Finland: Finnish Environment Institute
- Greece: National Technical University of Athens
- Hungary: General Directorate for Environment, Nature and Water
- Latvia: Latvian Council of Science
- Portugal: Foundation for Science and Technology
- Romania: Ministry of Environment and Water Management
- Sweden: Swedish Environment Protection Agency
- Spain: Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia
- France: Association pour le Développement de l'Enseignement et des Recherches auprès des Universités, des Centres de Recherche et des Entreprises d'Aquitaine

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“ IWRM.Net will tackle the WFD implementation by defining research programmes and allowing the formulation of needs through a bottom-up approach. ”

Shared vision

IWRM.Net will examine integrated water resources management issues and identify both short-term and long-term research needs. It also hopes to improve the public's understanding of the need for research in this area and to promote interdisciplinary activities across Europe. To ensure the project has a lasting impact, the partners have agreed a shared vision for what IWRM.Net should offer by 2010. It should be:

- A privileged source of knowledge for integrated water resource management research in Europe, especially as it relates to the Framework Directive;
- A forum for the future development and coordination of research needs;
- An important communications link between researchers, policy-makers and managers;
- A body that can bring together researchers and funders from different countries so that they can work on joint research activities; and
- A place to exchange best practice.

To realise its vision, the project will analyse the sector's future research needs, develop joint, transnational activities and bring together bodies that work in the same research areas. This could mean forming clusters so that researchers can work in areas of shared interest, or the development of full-blown common research programmes. IWRM.Net will, of course, actively develop ways of assisting researchers and policy-developers with handling the research demands of the Water Framework Directive. These actions should help the project to drive better mutual recognition of national and regional research and cut down on overlaps and duplication of effort. And true to the European Research Area's goals, the project will attempt to generate activities at the European scale which could tap into the EU's Framework Programmes for research. Bearing in mind the Directive's all-embracing nature and the new requirements for a Europe-wide approach to research for water resources management, the network promises to be a timely way to foster cohesion between the many different organisations and agencies in this sector.