

Water, water everywhere . . .

“Improving the visibility of national and regional water research programmes will remove a major barrier to rapid implementation of results by practitioners in the real world.”

and technology for lowering risks. In many cases, scientists do not fully understand users' real needs, while users are unaware of the latest technical options.

On the map

Led by the Office International de l'Eau (OIEau) and the International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO), the ERA-NET Specific support action IWRM.Net has set out to map national and regional IWRM-related research programmes throughout the enlarged EU-25. This is the first step towards the preparation of a demand-driven, bottom-up proposal for a full five-year ERA-NET project, whose aim will be the coordination and mutual opening of local programmes in pursuit of the common objectives established by the Water Framework Directive and the European Water Initiative.

A steering committee has been created. Alongside INBO are research programme managers representing funding bodies from seven member countries – France, Germany, Sweden and Spain from among the current EU Member States, and Poland, Hungary and Romania from the Accession countries. But this is by no means a closed group, and the managers of programmes in up to ten additional countries are expected to join the committee as work progresses. Based on a holistic analysis of reports on the research programmes in 15 countries, the steering committee will formulate proposals for action to realise inter-programme synergies, and to improve the flow of exploitable results to water resource

Integrated water resources management (IWRM) – the comprehensive coordination of water development and use – is a prerequisite for compliance with the EU's Water Framework Directive. EU Framework Programmes have encouraged the exchange of know-how between IWRM-related research projects. But considerable resources are devoted to applied research by national and regional governments, and by water authorities, and these efforts are not currently coordinated in any way. IWRM.Net will map existing research programmes and bring together their managers with a view to the creation of common, demand-driven research strategies and programmes that promise to improve greatly the speed and effectiveness of Europe's IWRM research.

This is a preparatory project. The consortium will use it to look for additional partners and to define the workplan for a full Coordination Action under the ERA-NET scheme.

Integrated water resources management (IWRM) originally focused on balancing the demands of different user groups – within a river basin, for example. Today, the concept has been extended to encompass technical and political integration, and the comprehensive coordination of water development and use, in order to optimise economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Within the European Union, the need to comply with the Water Framework Directive has made IWRM a priority for all water authorities, while the European Water Initiative offers similar encouragement to the governments of non-EU countries.

A particular target for integration is to overcome the traditional separation between the water policy, water resource management and scientific communities. This affects the setting of research priorities and the free flow of results to managers and policy-makers, often leading to delays in the socially beneficial exploitation of the latest science – water management policy is not always based on current knowledge



Specific support action



Full title:

Towards a European-wide exchange network for improving dissemination of Integrated Water Resources Management research outcomes

Research field:

Integrated water resource management

Coordinator:

France: Office International de l'Eau

Partners:

- France: International Network of Basin Organisation (INBO)

Further information:

Mr Gilles Neveu, Office International de l'Eau
21 rue de Madrid, Paris, 75008
France
Fax: +33 5 55 63 52 23
g.neveu@oieau.fr

Duration:

9 months

EC funding:

€180,000

Project reference:

SSA-003223-IWRM.Net

“Bringing together those responsible for the various national programmes will allow them to share results more effectively, and to make better use of scarce resources.”

managers. It will invite around 50 research programme managers – as well as the leaders of European academic networks and research clusters – to discuss these proposals at a brainstorming workshop. Their conclusions will determine the structure and modus operandi of the exchange and collaboration network to be established by the follow-up ERA-NET project.

Turning on the tap

Successive EU Research Framework Programmes have done much to stimulate the creation of clusters designed to facilitate cross-fertilisation between complementary IWRM-related research projects.

But national ministries, water authorities and regional governments all finance significant applied research programmes to support the implementation of their policies, as do NATO, UN agencies and international NGOs. Currently, no mechanism exists that can provide an overview of these very considerable efforts, or of their results. But there is known to be considerable duplication of effort, while anecdotal evidence suggests frequent mismatches between the funded research and the real needs of practitioners. In particular, the scientific community is poorly equipped to provide the immediate, cross-disciplinary solutions required by water managers who, in turn, fail to appreciate the necessity of ongoing basic research.

IWRM.Net has adopted an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses the social sciences and economics as well as scientific and technical aspects. It aims to develop mutual understanding of research needs, programmes and practices between countries and regions, in the context of a holistic structure involving programme managers, researchers and water resource managers and users. By identifying and bringing together the managers of national and regional IWRM research programmes, it hopes to kick-start a process of co-operation and the mutual opening of programmes from which all will benefit – and which will lead eventually to fuller integration of European IWRM research strategies and funding.

The managers of IWRM research programmes are now under intense pressure to help public authorities meet the deadlines for implementing the Water Framework Directive. But at the same time, their budgets are shrinking. The opportunity offered by IWRM.Net to improve the speed and efficiency of their work by coordinating it at European level is extremely timely, and they are likely to seize it with enthusiasm. The network's outputs are also expected to be of great interest to developing countries, where adequate access to safe water is a top priority.