

CEL Water and Wetlands Specialist Group

The Water and Wetlands Specialist Group was established by CEL in January 2002 (it was initially known as a Forum) in recognition of the growing importance of water and wetlands law. The formation of this network of lawyers will help to move forward an area of law that arguably has the most fundamental consequences for all communities. The importance of better water resources management is further highlighted by being a constant theme in the WSSD Plan of Implementation.

The twenty-five CEL members involved in the Group are active in many areas of water resources law, including the development and administration of legislation, education, and support of community action groups. Specific areas of interest and expertise of Group members include:

- water rights (including allocation systems and traditional and indigenous rights);
- international instruments (including the EU Water Framework Directive and the revision of the Helsinki Rules);
- freshwater conservation (including wetlands management);
- economic instruments (including pricing and trade);
- environmental flows.

The Group is at this stage primarily an internet-based discussion group for the purposes of networking amongst members, providing a forum for making new contacts and for providing information to assist members with specific issues. A regular newsletter will also be used in 2003, with contributions from members on events, news (local law reform, campaigns etc), and references to new articles or other useful sources.

Members' activities in 2002 included:

- attendance by some at either or both the IUCN conference in Pietersmaritzburg, and the IUCN 'Futures Day' at WSSD, where Professor Robyn Stein presented on the topic "The last drop in the river – environmental flows" and was a panellist during discussion;
- discussion on international instruments on water and the Helsinki Rules. This raised interest among members in progress on the current revision of the Helsinki Rules, with Prof Joe Dellapenna providing updates on progress, and offering to chair a subgroup (see below) on the issue;
- assisting IUCN ELC in locating historical information and key documents relating to the Nile Treaty.

The Group has additional potential as an 'expert group' in many emerging areas of water law, to provide advice, and to act as a pool of available expertise for both volunteer assistance and other work. A small number of subgroups will be formed during 2003 to develop this potential. Subgroups presently suggested are: Revising the Helsinki Rules; Environmental flows; Indigenous rights and Property rights in water.

The subgroups concern matters intrinsic to many of the actions in the WSSD Plan of Implementation. Careful consideration will be given to how the work of subgroups may contribute to furthering the Plan.

New members are always welcome to the Group. I can be contacted at dyson@chariot.net.au

Megan Dyson
Chair, CEL Water and Wetlands Specialist Group