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IUCN is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN is a multi-cultural, multilingual organization with 1000 staff located in 42 countries. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland.

<http://www.iucn.org>
press@iucn.org

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ACCEPT 'ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS' AS SOLUTION TO SOCIAL CONFLICT OVER WATER

Stockholm, Sweden, 19 August 2004 (IUCN) – A range of international organizations today accepted 'environmental flows' as the tool to ward off social conflict and environmental degradation due to the overuse of water in the river basins of the world. The endorsement was received at a special session at the 14th World Water Week underway in Stockholm.

'We believe the implementation of environmental flows is a necessary step to increase water security,' said Mr. Anders Bertell, Executive Director of the Stockholm International Water Institute, host of the conference.

The acceptance by the international community in Stockholm of 'environmental flows' is a major milestone because it demonstrates that 'environmental flows' has become widely accepted as a standard tool in modern water management.

"We commend the work of IUCN on environmental flows and are currently reviewing ways to contribute to negotiated approaches to water allocation," said Mr. M. Gopalakrishnan, Secretary General of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage.

'Environmental flows' means that water in rivers is managed in such a way that downstream users and ecosystems receive enough water to remain 'in business'. It entails negotiations between water users, based on an understanding of the impacts their water use has on others, and on their natural environment.

"IUCN is already working in ten basins around the world to implement this approach, and with this endorsement we are confident that number will multiply in coming years. That is good news for everyone who depends on water, including nature," said Dr Ger Bergkamp of the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative.

This practical tool enables water managers to move from a situation of uncontrolled use of and conflict over water, to use of water that is rational and negotiated. In a time where some rivers no longer reach the sea and others suffer from increasing social conflict and environmental destruction because of excessive water use, such a tool is of vital importance. Furthermore, in poor countries, where millions of people are dependent on what nature provides, environmental flows clearly contributes to poverty alleviation.

Experience with environmental flows in various basins also shows that it is wise to start implementation before social and environmental problems arise. Early application of the tool saves money and ensures long-term prosperity in river basins, as the experience from Australia shows.

“In the Murray Darling Basin, Australian Governments are now investing 500 million Australian dollars to return the system to environmentally sustainable levels of extraction. These are costs that can be saved if one applies environmental flows earlier”, said Mr. John Scanlon, Head of the IUCN Environmental Law Programme.

The Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) all endorsed the approach and said they would use it in future.

About environmental flows

More information on the concept and its application can be found in the IUCN guidebook ‘Flow – the essentials of environmental flows’, which is now widely recognised as the most comprehensive state-of-the-art guide on the topic.

The book can be downloaded directly from <http://iucn.org/themes/wani/pub/FLOW.pdf> or through <http://www.waterandnature.org/flow/main.html>.

More information

Dr. Ger Bergkamp
Coordinator Water & Nature Initiative
IUCN – The World Conservation Union
+41.79.615.0479
Ger.Bergkamp@iucn.org

Mr. Elroy Bos
Senior Communication Officer
IUCN – The World Conservation Union
+41.79.213.4670
Elroy.Bos@iucn.org