



RESOLUTION
EECCA NWO International Conference
Transboundary Water Cooperation in the EECCA countries: Lessons Learned and
Future Directions

An international videoconference of the EECCA Network of Water Management Organizations was held on 2-3 March 2021. The participants addressed the current issues of transboundary water cooperation, summed up annual results and discussed future tasks of the Network.

Following the discussion, the Conference's participants identified the next key points and recommendations.

1. Increasing competing water uses of sectors and countries combined with the impact of climate change make close cooperation and **collaboration at national, basin, transboundary and international levels** imperative. Comprehensive and systemic measures for rational and optimal water and land use, including digitization and automation of hydraulic structures and application of water-saving technologies become particularly important. To give additional momentum to cooperation in the field of water and sustainable development, it is proposed to start developing **strategic documents**, including the Regional Program of Rational Water Use in Central Asia and apply to the Eurasian Economic Union's (EAEU) leadership with the proposal in favor of developing a Water Strategy of EAEU countries up to 2050.
2. Having heard the case-studies of bilateral cooperation in river basins of EECCA countries, the participants noted the positive value of such cooperation in solving operational issues of water management and emphasized the importance of developing **basin-wide cooperation** for coordinated use and development of shared water resources.
3. Taking into account increased frequency and intensity of extreme hydrological phenomena, including floods and low water, as well as imminent water shortage, the participants take the view that they could apply to the governments of the Russian Federation and the Central Asian countries about expediency of **a new view on re-distribution** of surplus flood water of Siberian rivers to the regions of southern Siberia and Central Asia.
4. The participants expressed concern over the problem of **sustainable water supply in Crimea** and called on Russia and Ukraine to make maximum efforts to ensure the right of the population to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and to respect the relevant economic, social and cultural rights of Crimean residents.

5. While expressing serious concern about the shortage of qualified personnel in the water sector, the participants emphasized the urgent need for **coordination of activities on training, retraining and professional development in the sector**. In particular, it was decided to exchange experience within the Network in unification of educational and methodical base and preparation of specialized courses. Successful implementation of the Central Asian Knowledge Network's Program for methodological base development was noted and could be of use for EECCA NWO in part of developing a common water educational space and academic mobility. In this context, it would be expedient to form a Training and Methodological Expert Group to develop water training standards in EECCA countries. It is suggested to consider the possibility of establishing a virtual international water education academy to build capacities of water professionals in EECCA countries. The next Network's conference is suggested to be held on the theme "Water Education: Challenges and Prospects" in late 2021 or early 2022.

6. Working with **youth** as the main driving force of the countries' development is recognized as one of future strategic directions of the Network. Young people should be central in initiating new sustainable approaches to water management and in promoting cooperation between the countries. Consider it necessary to involve young professionals in the Network's activity and form a group of future water leaders. Apply to UNECE with the request to support this proposal next year, including financial support.

7. The participants noted the importance of efforts of EECCA NWO and SIC ICWC in developing the **Expert Platform** for water security, sustainable development and future studies in the EECCA region and neighboring countries. Particularly they noted development of the Platform's web-site (cawater-info.net/expert-platform/) and the database of experts, as well as joint work of experts on the "Diagnostic Report on Rational Use of Water Resources in Central Asia as of 2019" and in the review of speeches of EECCA countries at the UN General Assembly over the period from 1992 to 2020. It was suggested to apply to concerned countries and international partners to support multidisciplinary research within the framework of the Expert Platform.

8. Since China's "Belt and Road" Initiative can have a substantial influence on economic, socio-environmental and geopolitical conditions of EECCA countries' development, it is recommended for members of EECCA NWO to consider carefully the **water component of the Initiative**. Exchange of information on countries' cooperation with Chinese organizations and companies will help to better plan future cooperation, avoid unnecessary risks and identify beneficial areas for collaboration.

9. In the context of the **risks posed by adaptation projects in Russian and Mongolian river basins**, the following was recommended:

- Apply to authorized bodies responsible for transboundary water basins in Russia and Mongolia with the recommendation to suspend construction of a dam on the Ulza River until a joint comprehensive environmental and economic impact assessment is made and the public discussion of the project assessment results is completed in the two countries. Recommend analyzing alternative ways to meet water demands in the context of changing climate and cyclical water fluctuations.
- Apply to the UNESCO World Heritage Center and Committee, the advisory bodies of the World Heritage Convention, and the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands with a recommendation to urgently consider threats to a world heritage site under the title "Landscapes of Dauria" and call for immediate EIA of a dam project on

the Ulza River with the project suspended until the Convention bodies review the assessment.

- Apply to the Mongolian Government with a proposal to conduct a strategic environmental assessment of the "Blue Horse" (Huh Mor) Project for its impact on river ecosystems and economy, as well as on water sharing mechanisms in transboundary basins. Recommend the Government of Mongolia to hold consultations with neighboring countries (PRC and Russia) on the development of joint adaptation programs in the transboundary basins of Ulza-Torey Lakes, Khalkhingol-Kerulen-Argun, Selenga-Baikal, Bulgan, etc.
- Apply to UNDP, the International Adaptation Fund, the Secretariat and relevant bodies of the Framework Convention on Climate Change with the recommendation on the need to conduct a systematic comprehensive socio-environmental assessment of water management measures proposed by countries as part of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for mitigation and adaptation under the Paris Agreement, especially projects in transboundary basins. Recommend disseminating those contributions among all riparian countries of transboundary basins for evaluation and opinions. Submit information on the Ulza and Selenga River projects that require such assessments at international level to the above mentioned bodies as examples.
- Recommend that UNECE support the use of the Water Convention's tools and impact assessments for the hydraulic projects submitted as part of a pilot project on climate adaptation in Dauria basins.

10. The participants were pleased to note the **effective and fruitful activity of EECCA NWO over more than 12 years**. With the support of UNECE, the Government of the Russian Federation, SIC ICWC and the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), this activity contributed to regular exchange of ideas, information and best practices in various water-related aspects and maintained professional unity and mutual understanding between experts and countries in the region. In 2020, despite the quarantine restrictions, the Network collaborated with the Expert platform of future studies with mutual benefits.

The following achievements of the Network can be highlighted over 2019-2020:

- organization and holding of the international conference of EECCA NWO on the theme "Science and Innovations for Water Security" (23-24 September 2019, Yekaterinburg, Russia);
- participation of EECCA NWO members in the meeting of the ICID Working Group on Irrigation and Drainage in the States under Socio-Economic Transformation, WG-IDSST (28 October 2020 via video-conference) and in the meeting of the INBO International Liaison Bureau (3 November 2020 via video-conference);
- issue of information and research publications. The recent ones included: the collection of EECCA NWO papers "Science and Innovations for Water Security" (volumes 1 and 2); the collection "Selected transboundary water agreements signed between European and Asian states over 1992-2019"; Water Yearbook: Central Asia and around the Globe that presented short reviews of key water-related developments and events over the past year;
- preparation and dissemination of a weekly digest "Water management, irrigation and environment in Central Asia";
- further development of the Central Asian knowledge portal - CAWater-Info portal (cawater-info.net) – as a component of the set of unified tools for implementation of

IWRM, adapted to specific conditions in river basins with different degrees of water shortage in arid and semi-arid zones in EECCA countries;

- further development of the E-Atlas of water-management and environmental organizations in EECCA countries;
- support to establishment of the regional Expert platform on water security, sustainable development and future studies and to multidisciplinary research and exchange.

11. It was noted important to strengthen efforts of the Network in the following key areas:

- further development of the information space on water management, land reclamation, and nature conservation, including exchange of best practices, experience and knowledge in the area of management;
- initiation of joint multidisciplinary research on water security and sustainable development;
- organization of training workshops, study-tours and webinars to share experience and information on research and technological base developments and innovation application in water sectors of the EECCA countries, as well as implementation of joint projects;
- attraction of basin organizations and the youth to the Network's activity.

12. While appreciating an **invaluable contribution of UNECE, the Russian Government, SIC ICWC and INBO** to the development of EECCA NWO, which has proven to be a useful platform for communication, knowledge sharing and joint research on water and sustainable development, the participants apply to UNECE and the Russian Government to continue support of the Network's activity in the future.