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COMMISSION FOR HYDROLOGY

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Téléphone: Int'l + (613) 9669 4179
Facsimilé: Int'l + (613) 9669 70 71
E-mail: b.stewart@bom.gov.au

Climate, Consultative and Hydrological services Branch
Bureau of Meteorology
GPO Box 1289K
MELBOURNE, Vic. 3001
Australia

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GENEVA, 22 July 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I recently attended the sixtieth session of the WMO Executive Council (EC) in Geneva in June 2008 and thought I should update you on some of the major activities and issues coming into the thirteenth session of the Commission for Hydrology (CHy) to be held in Geneva from 4 to 12 November 2008.

As we have our Commission meeting this year, I had the opportunity to make an in-depth report to EC (see Doc. 3.3 via <ftp://ftp.wmo.int/Documents/SESSIONS/EC/EC-LX/>) and used this opportunity to reaffirm the primary focus of the Commission, report on progress achieved during the intersessional period (see my circular letter of 20 June 2007 http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/hwrp/index_en.html), respond to EC concerns regarding the relationships with other UN bodies and present the framework for the future work programme of CHy, to be discussed at its thirteenth session in November.

There were also a number of other topics of relevance to Commission members that I will provide some feedback on in this circular letter. These include, reporting in a Results-based Management format, the role and function of the technical commissions and participation grants for attendance at technical commissions,

Primary focus of CHy

The primary focus of enabling the collection of appropriate quality, robustly obtained and reliably provided water resources information products and services, targeted to meet the needs of various users and inform sound and reliable water resources management decisions, including water allocations, floodplain management and emergency management response to flood events was reinforced. It is incumbent on the hydrological community to move the data we collect up the information value chain through the development, implementation and dissemination of high quality hydrological services and products.

To: Members of the Commission for Hydrology (CHy-189)

Concerns regarding relationships with other UN bodies

After examining and evaluating the current communication mechanisms between the various UN agencies with a high profile in water at the international level, it was considered that the current level of communication and cooperation is essential and appropriate. However, noting that some Members had concerns with respect to the potential for duplication of effort and inefficient use of resources at the international level, rather than establishing any new mechanisms it was recommended that:

- Member countries assist in improving the cooperation and coordination through strengthening the communications at the national and regional levels; and
- The WMO Secretary-General write to the UNESCO stressing the need for the continuation of, and support for, the existing coordination mechanisms.

Framework for the future programme of work of CHy

At its February 2008 meeting, the Advisory Working Group (AWG) of CHy in cooperation with the chairpersons of the Working Groups on Hydrology (WGSH) of the Regional Associations (RAs) recommended in the development of the work programme of the Commission for 2009-12 that we should focus on the following four theme areas:

1. Quality Management Framework – Hydrology (QMF-Hydrology);
2. Water Resources Assessment;
3. Hydrological forecasting and prediction and hydrological disaster risk reduction;
4. Water and Climate.

EC-LX endorsed these thematic areas and they will now form the basis of discussions on the future work programme to be held in November at CHy-XIII.

Results-based Management

The agenda for EC-LX was based around the move to Results-based Management (RBM) and thus the focus on WMO's eleven Expected Results (http://www.wmo.int/pages/about/spla_en.html) and as such, the inputs from the technical commissions were spread across those Expected Results that they contribute to. In the future, we will be expected to report on CHy's contributions to various Expected Result areas, in addition to the Expected Result 3 "Enhanced capabilities of Members to provide better hydrological forecasts and assessments", as opposed to generic hydrology and water resources programme focus. We will also be required to provide guidance to activities under other Expected Results including our needs and requirements. For example, we need to be prepared to identify the needs of the hydrological community with regard to weather and climate services and products.

The role and function of the technical commissions

The decision to move to the RBM means that the role and function of the technical commissions has again come into focus and we will need to be well prepared to show our value and develop a contribution mechanism to this new operating environment. However, I firmly believe that the technical commissions are already providing the required technical guidance and expertise to WMO activities. Keeping in view the proliferation of organizations engaged in water and climate activities, the need for preserving the expert nature of WMO has never been more pertinent. Technical commissions, with their various expert groups, provide the capabilities and expertise necessary to produce the required results.

Participation grants for attendance at technical commissions

The AWG, in cooperation with the Secretariat, attempted to establish a trial for CHy-XIII that would test the practical implications of providing partial financial support (participation grants) to participants from some developing countries and least developed countries, including those from emerging economies, to attend its sessions. In essence, the Executive Council, noting the questions raised regarding the measures proposed by CHy, requested its Working Group on Operational and Strategic Planning to look further into the issue and report back to the next session of EC.

The WMO Strategic Plan

At CHy-XIII in November this year, we will need to discuss the topic of WMO Strategic Planning. I would therefore urge all of you to consider in what directions, and how, we would see WMO moving forward in the area of hydrology and water resources. Where should we focus our efforts into the future and what mechanisms should we put in place to achieve this, remembering that as we bring our ideas back to the WMO Executive Council we will need to express them within the RBM framework.

CHy-XIII – 4-12 November 2008 in Geneva

Finally, I want to remind you that we have the Commission meeting in Geneva in November this year and urge you to put in place the procedures necessary for you to attend this important meeting. It will decide our programme of work for the next four years and is thus the major meeting on the WMO Hydrology and Water Resources Programme agenda. In order to encourage participation and inputs from the wider water community, a separate Website has been established (http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/hwrp/index_en.html) and we will soon start putting on-line papers to enable those experts from developing countries who are unable to attend the session of the Commission physically to participate in pre-session e-Discussions. I urge you all to keep up to date with this Website and begin to provide your feedback and comments on the proposals put forward.

Warm Regards,

(Bruce Stewart)
President of CHy