



ESA/STAT/AC.116/

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

**User-Producer Conference on
Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management
Voorburg, the Netherlands 22-24 May 2006**

**Organized under the auspices of the
UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting
and hosted by Statistics Netherlands**

OPENING STATEMENT

**Paul Cheung, Director
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Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the User-Producer Conference: Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Statistics Netherlands for hosting this important Conference. As we all know, the Netherlands is famous for its struggle with water. The country would not have existed if its population had not won this struggle and harnessed this natural resource effectively. Therefore, no better location could have been selected for organizing this Conference. The motto of the country makes explicit reference to this struggle “Luctor et Emergo” (in English “I struggle and emerge”). I also would like to express my special thanks to the participants and experts from the national statistical offices, water-related institutions and NGOs for accepting our invitation to have a dialogue on water accounting.

In particular, I would like to mention Ms. Jaqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency for finding the time in her busy schedule to join us and to share with us the development of water accounting in her agency. I would also like to thank the representatives from the users’ community for coming and in particular Mr. Roberto Lenton, Chair of the Global Water Partnership Technical Committee, Mr. Gordon Young, Coordinator of the World Water Assessment Programme, which recently has issued the very impressive publication World Water Development Report 2 and Mr. Manuel Dengo, Secretary of the UN-Water and of the Secretary General Advisory Board on Water Supply and Sanitation.

This Conference is the first of a series organized under the auspices of the UN Committee on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA), bringing together users and producers of environment related information. One of the tasks of the UNCEEA, established by the Statistical Commission in March 2005, is to mainstream environmental-economic accounting and related statistics and elevate it to the level of official statistics. In this context, this Conference has been organized with the focus on water resources with the objective of building consensus on a conceptual statistical framework for hydrological-economic information in support of integrated water resource management. I am pleased that Mr. Walter Radermacher, Chair of the UN

Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, is here with us. He has been instrumental in steering the UN Committee and in the organization of this Conference.

Monitoring and assessing water resources are not easy tasks both at national as well as international level. Information is often dispersed in various agencies and collected to respond to specific policy needs of different players resulting in a plethora of indicators often incoherent among each other and inconsistent across time. The water accounting framework responds to the need for a conceptual framework bringing together information from different sources based on a common set of classifications, terminology and accounting tables. The strength of the water accounting framework is that it is based on the System of National Accounts which is the standard framework for economic statistics and indicators. In the same vein, as the 1993 SNA and the Balance of Payments are standards for economic statistics, we are proposing that the water accounts be endorsed as the standard for integrating hydrological and economic statistics.

The water accounts have the objectives of fostering the adoption of data compilation standards, improving data quality, promoting consistency of the indicators derived from the accounts, and enhancing inter-institutional cooperation. In addition, by integrating hydrological information in the economic accounts, water accounts can assist in mainstreaming water policy in economic decision making. The water accounting handbook entitled 'Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources' that will be presented in this Conference, discusses these methodologies. It has been produced in cooperation with the London Group on Environmental Accounting comprised of experts from national statistical offices and international organizations. In this context, I greatly acknowledge their contributions in the preparation of the handbook. I would like to mention, among others, the contribution of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and South Africa as well as that of Eurostat and of our colleagues from the Division of Sustainable Development.

The handbook contains standard and supplementary tables for the compilation of water accounts. The standard tables constitute the minimum data set that all countries are encouraged to compile and represent a step forward towards the elevation of the SEEA to

the level of a statistical standard by 2010. These tables were designed with the objective of facilitating the compilation of the accounts in countries and obtain information which is comparable across country and over time. Eurostat has agreed to adopt the standard tables for their data collection on water. The supplementary tables consist of items that are of interest to analysts and policy makers in specific countries or for which compilation is still experimental and not directly linked with the 1993 SNA. This is the case for example of social aspects linked to water such as number of people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

An increasing number of countries (approximately 25), both developed and developing, are or have started implementing water accounts. Experience has shown that it is feasible to implement the accounts with the available information. Countries where the accounts have been implemented and are used for policy making have improved coordination and cooperation between the various agencies related to water, have reduced duplication of data collection and identified data gaps. Further, the quality of their water statistics has improved because of the check and balances inherent in the accounting system.

Despite the fact that the water accounts have been compiled by an increasing number of countries and used for policy making, they remain fairly unknown to the user community at large. The objective of this conference is to bring the users and producers together and discuss the users' needs of water information and the extent to which water accounts meets those needs. My hope is that this conference accepts the water accounts as the information system for the assessment and monitoring of water resources, as well as for the design/formulation of water-related policies and endorses the creation of a Round table.

There are many players in the water community, sometimes in competition with each other. Many of you may wonder about the role of the UN Statistics Division, which is fairly unknown in this community. The UNSD serves as the Secretariat of the Statistical Commission, the apex entity in the international statistical system where international statistical standards and activities are considered and approved. We are committed to the advancement of the global statistical system. In addition to compiling and disseminating

global statistical information and supporting countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems, UNSD develops standards and norms for statistical activities so that the basic information is relevant, reliable and comparable across time and space.

Our contribution to the water community is the development of this conceptual framework of water and economic accounting, and the harmonization of methodologies on input data and output indicators which will ultimately lead to the improvement of the basic information on water and to more reliable and consistent indicators on water.

In the field of water statistics, the UNSD collects, in collaboration with UNEP, country data on fresh water on a biennial basis. As you know, international data collection activities are being harmonized through the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics. We are also preparing a handbook on water statistics which will facilitate the collection, compilation and dissemination of basic water statistics. These data collection activities are consistent with the framework on water accounting.

This conference is an historical moment for us as we have the opportunity to move forward the water accounts as being an internationally accepted conceptual framework for hydrological-economic information in the users' community.

In closing, I would like to wish you success in the deliberations during the next three days and I am looking forward to the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you.