

DECLARATION

On the occasion of the 1st Congress on Water of Slovenia, held on 22 March 2012, the Slovenian water-related societies and associations issued the following observations, conclusions and recommendations:

Protection of water and its sustainable use is the key of sustainable development. Therefore the United Nations proclaimed the period 2005–2015 as the International Decade for Action »Water for Life«. Achieving sustainability of water resources for man and nature is also one of the requirement of the EU Water Framework Directive, one of the goal of the international Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014 and, last but not least, the requirement of the Slovenian Water Act. Furthermore, the EU Floods Directive is a warning that a constant care in protection from adverse effects of water is imperative. The problems of erosion and landslides, as forms of adverse action of water, are addressed by the EU Soil Framework Directive, protecting soil, especially soil as food source.

Slovenia is a country abundant in water resources, however, it is still unable to protect and sustainable explore these resources properly. In recent decades, in some areas the situation has deteriorated, with negative implications for the development of water activities and the protection of water. The adverse effects of water rise due to the insufficient care and investment into precautionary and structural measures in the last decade. This is why water-related societies and associations of Slovenia decided to convene the 1st Slovenian Congress on Water, which was held on 22 March 2012, at the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Ljubljana. The institutions participating in the organization of the Congress were:

Društvo vodarjev Slovenije (Water Management Society of Slovenia)

- SDZV – Slovensko društvo za zaščito voda (Slovenian Water Pollution Control Association)
- SDNO – Slovensko društvo za namakanje in odvodnjo (SINCID Slovenian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage)
- SZGG – Slovensko združenje za geodezijo in geofiziko – Nacionalna sekcija za hidrologijo (Slovenian Association of Geodesy and Geophysics – National Hydrology Section)
- SDHR – Slovensko društvo za hidravlične raziskave (Slovenian Association for Hydraulic Research)
- SLOCOLD – Slovenski komite za velike pregrade (Slovenian National Committee on Large Dams)
- RZS – Ribiška zveza Slovenije (Fishing Association of Slovenia)
- Slovensko kemijsko društvo (Slovenian Chemical Society)
- Društvo biologov Slovenije (Biological Society of Slovenia)
- SKIAH – Društvo slovenski komite mednarodnega združenja hidrogeologov – IAH (International Association of Hydrogeologists – Slovene Committee)
- Zveza prevoznikov po celinskih vodah Slovenije (Association of Inland Waterways Navigators of Slovenia)
- Odbor za mednarodni hidrološki program IHP UNESCO (Slovenian Committee for IHP UNESCO)

129 representatives of the societies and associations attended the Congress and, after a full day of discussions, the following conclusions and recommendations were agreed upon:

The regulations related to water policy in Slovenia are non-transparent, while the responsibilities are dispersed among different ministries and organisational units inside these ministries. Complex problems are all too often solved by professionally not adequate skilled civil servants, who are not able to deal with all tasks. This results in long procedures, professionally inadequate regulations, deficiency in field oversight, postponement of decisions, large material damage and also fatalities. Besides inadequate organization of public services, the reason for such situation is also the disregard of professional criteria in employing and promotion of professional staff. River Basin Management Plans, adopted to satisfy the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, are not operational documents, since they contain many deficiencies, and above all they lack the bases for sustainable use of water. The national interests of the state and interests of development are being neglected. Some articles of the Water Act (2002) have been dead norms for more than a decade. In the long-term, the question of granting concessions in relation to the management of the water regime has also remained unsolved.

The existing Slovenian legislative and regulatory provisions, and corresponding operational programmes of environmental protection and water management have implemented the EU legislation faster and more rigorously than required and expected by the EU. Professional norms have been introduced into regulatory provisions, thus precluding professional approach to individual, specific problems (different local terrain, geological, hydrologic, ecosystem and socio-economic environments). We propose that such norms, covered by regulatory provisions, are issued as specific technical standards, which is the norm in other EU member states also.

There are no long-term development plans, water management bases nor any other regulations enabling coordinated sustainable development of water-related activities. We are potentially losing a lot of resources in GDP, many work places in the countryside and, finally, environmental protection is suffering as a result. Regarding research and development, the Slovenian researchers obtain more funds from the different EU programmes than from national research projects.

Regarding drinking water supply, the protection of drinking water resources is subject to Government's decisions, and, considering the way of the decision-making, only in the next few decades all drinking water resources of Slovenia will be protected by governmental decrees. In the process of adopting the decrees, the drinking water supply operators are not a party in the procedure nor are they invited to offer their opinion refer the planned activities in the drinking water protection zones. The drinking water supply operators are obliged to ensure the quality of tap water, but they are not responsible for the state of installations at the end-user location.

The threat and pollution of water resources are rising, which indicates the lack of proper control over potential polluters. About 43% of Slovenia is Karst area, however, the Karst aquifers recharging important water resources are not researched enough for us to be able to protect them properly and ensure safe water supply.

The technology of drinking water treatment is not always adequate and it does not in line with technological advancements. Small drinking water supply systems are especially critical, where the economic power of local communities fails at introducing modern technology and proper control.

Water infrastructure is poorly maintained due to the lack of funds and the present situation will even deteriorate in the future, resulting in reduction of public water supply quality, increased damage during accidents, and fatalities. The safe maintenance and operation of dam structures is also insufficiently regulated. For large dams, a proper administrative organization and safety system must be set up, which requires the adoption of relevant regulations on dam safety as soon as possible, in accordance with international standards, and a clear division of responsibility between the owners and operators. It is necessary to record the actual state of the of dams and reservoirs, to prepare a strategy for managing the structures and regulate the formal legal relationships regarding ownership and management of structures, where needed, which is a precondition for enforcing the dam safety policy. Regarding the use of water potential, now 4,296 GWh/year is exploited, which is 47 % of the total technically available water potential. According to strategic documents the plan is to exploit approx. 5,800 GWh/year (63 % of technical water potential) by 2030. The construction of hydropower plants has important implications for economic development and undisputed economic benefits: If the Sava river hydropower chain had been built 30 years ago, the investment would have returned in full already, based only on the power sold. Important is the role of hydropower plants in taking over ancillary services in the electric power system of Slovenia, and environmental benefits – it is estimated that with the planned production of the hydropower plants the CO₂ emissions would be reduced by 1,800 kT, which is 30 % of all thermal power plant emissions in 2011.

Due to time constraints, Slovenia will not be able to use most of the Cohesion Fund (2007–2013), planned for new investments of water infrastructure, while the problems of water supply of the Primorska and Pomurje regions and flood protection are to remain and, in the future, will have to be addressed through funding from the Slovenian state budget. The reason lies in the lack of political will in carrying out large and long term projects. The other reasons are also not prepared project documents, changing administrative procedures and reorganization of administrative services to frequent, which results in poor realization of operational programmes adopted in the past and still in force today (traffic and water infrastructure, collection and treatment of wastewater) and ineffective of the funds of EU financial programmes. We need better preparation of projects on the part of professionals and improved and co-ordinated support of different administrative services in the preparation and implementation. Both, the professionals and administrative services, have to act in a proactive way. Due to the non-enforcement of provisions of water acts a large portion of water land is privately owned, which makes the carrying out of projects difficult.

In the last twenty years, river-side space has been left to overgrow, while the consequences of overgrowth and costly maintenance of such rivers are not considered. The maintenance is further conditioned by the prohibition of interventions into the river bed and banks during most part of the year. This results in flooding of surrounding areas and flood-incurred damage. Regarding maintenance, the public benefit of rivers and flood protection are neglected and subordinated to environmental protection. The overgrown parts of the river space develop into

precious ecological niches, which, however, must be destroyed during intervention activities. Storm-water is a special problem, since during floods storm-water cannot be discharged by the storm-water system and the surrounding areas are flooded. A long-term solution of stable funding of regular and investment maintenance is necessary.

Rivers and streams are inseparably connected to the river-side belt and hinterland, and only integrated management can provide sufficient amount and quality of water in the landscape, with favourable consequences for agriculture and biotic diversity in the long term.

When trying to achieve larger and improved food self-sufficiency the scope of agrarian operations will have to be increased, especially through hydromelioration (irrigation, drainage, remediation of existing systems) and through enlargement of agricultural land by intensifying soil amelioration operations (remediation and revitalisation of forest – overgrown agricultural land and with strict restrictions of urbanization of agricultural land), without increasing the load on groundwater and surface water through intensification of production. The amelioration measures of agrarian operations should not increase land erosion and the rate of flood wave formation.

Regarding the trend of changing river regimes, characterised by higher hydrological extremes, especially in water deficient regions, it will be necessary to build new reservoirs for drinking water supply and irrigation, and with these measures to increase the proportion of exploitation of available water quantities, which is today at only 1%.

Today, water recreation activities are developing rapidly with exceptional potential for development. However, they are left to their own devices, being poorly controlled, non-coordinated with other uses of water and without the proper protection of users, which can ultimately lead to fatalities.

We are not prepared for the impacts of climate change and other man-made activities or for the introduction of non-native species into water and water-side space.

In the society it is necessary to define a comprehensive and long-term approach of water management with new professional, organizational, financial and political solutions, and clearly defined responsibilities. We need a long-term national strategy of water protection, which will be, with the support of sustainable economic development, directed into ensuring sustainable supply of the population with safe drinking water, its strategic reserves in case of extreme droughts and devastating natural disasters with regional effects, reduced flood and landscape risk, safe operation of water facilities and preservation of aquatic ecosystems. We, the non-governmental organizations whose work is related to water, undertake to encourage proactive attitude of all the interested parties in the processes of harmonizing the policies of water use and protection, share knowledge about water and ensure ecosystem services and goods of water systems in the future also.

In order to reach the goals set, the water-related professionals will have to design new methods, using research, and introduce new practices in water management (whereby knowledge from the state administration, and political will from policy-makers, will be required). Integral water management requires a multi-disciplinary approach and cooperation

of many professions related to water. In order to make the proposed expert solutions and development projects feasible, fields of dialogue and meetings between sectoral policies, the public, stakeholders, politicians and professional institutions should be organized and enabled. To this end, the awareness, knowledge and information of all citizens should be strengthened. The Slovenian citizens should know the value of aquatic ecosystems, the meaning of water retaining capacity of land and the implications of past water-related interventions.

In order to reach the mentioned goals and a successful solutions to identified problems the following is proposed:

Establishment of Water Administration, as was known in the ex-banate and was successfully in operation as the Water Community Association until 1989, while today it is known in some developed EU countries. The administration should be fit for integrated and sustainable water management and achievement of long-term goals. We need a professional supervision service with the authority for preventive action in the field. The minimum professional criteria in employing civil servants in water-related offices and proper work experience for managerial staff should be defined.

Furthermore, we propose changes of the Water Act, to eliminate the unnecessary administrative procedures, to strictly introduce the principle of subsidiarity, abolishment and proper rewriting of those parts of the legislation that have remained a dead norm. We propose the preparation of proper bases for management, that is, long-term strategic plans, adopted by the parliament. It would be sensible to confirm the individual long-term plans by means of a referendum.

A special attention should be given to monitoring of micropollutants and other substances that are introduced by chemical technology to the market each day. Equally, the introduction of non-native plant species into aquatic space should be addressed.

We need research and development projects, and pilot projects, which would enable the checking of modern technical and management achievements in practice. Special attention should be given to Karst, mountain areas and protected areas, where the study of water regimes should provide an important expert groundwork for any activities.

For remediation works the project documentation should be elaborated at same technical level as for the construction works, taking into account the implications for water regime and safety of other activities and users of space.

In order to reach sustainable development of water-related activities and protection of water, the water associations and societies will in future closely co-operate and co-ordinate their work. The next Congress on Water will be convened in 2016.