

UNEP

Draft Water Strategy

On the 23 October 1999, the United Nations Environment Programme issued the Revised Version of its Draft Water Strategy and Policy (see page 279).

In the foreword to the Draft, UNEP's Executive Director Klaus Töpfer explains the background leading up to this policy. He notes that the wide range of water-related issues impacting the environment is reflected in the diversity of international, bilateral, governmental and non-governmental groups and organisations involved. He states that UNEP's limited resources and its mandate to promote international cooperation in the field of the environment have meant that UNEP has worked with a number of assessment and management oriented mechanisms over the years. These mechanisms have provided, and will continue to provide, invaluable information and policy guidance. In the case of freshwater, this included the identification and integration of all related functions of freshwater resources, including ecosystem functioning, within the context of integrated riverbasin management that focuses on sustainable water use.

Key components of UNEP's Water Strategy and Policy are:

- Assessment Activities
- Management Activities
- Supporting Elements and Instruments
- Co-ordinating and Mobilising Actions

Other chapters consider the existing assessment and management tools and the UNEP GEF Water Portfolio.

UNEP's actions to date have included a regional assessment of the status of implementation of the freshwater objectives of Agenda 21, conducted between 1995 and 1996. The UNEP Governing Council also considered proposals for a UNEP Freshwater Strategy as well as documents submitted to the 7th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, outlining UNEP's role. UNEP's Water Strategy and Policy will build on lessons learnt from these existing programmes and mechanisms, such as in the areas of water quality and monitoring as well as the environmentally sound management of inland waters.

The participation of government institutions and inter-governmental bodies in the implementation of the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) and the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans will facilitate the monitoring of UNEP's Water Strategy and Policy,

the Executive Director said. UNEP will also convene regular fora to exchange views and information on new and emerging water-related issues as well as to review progress made and required in the implementation of its Water Strategy and Policy.

In view of the complexity and variety of water concerns, Klaus Töpfer said that UNEP, as the world's environmental conscience, will develop the capacity to bring together scientific evidence and catalyse responses to such challenges through policy development and management tools. UNEP's role will entail converting early warning data into accessible and usable information for



decision-making. Emphasis will also be placed on developing strategic partnerships, especially with governments, and improving co-ordination within the water sector in order to enhance UNEP's effectiveness in influencing the policy and legal framework in the field of water at the regional and international levels. As the only international body with a mandate as an intergovernmental environment policy forum, UNEP will play a facilitating role in transferring water-related knowledge and expertise to other countries.

With its experience and expertise in dealing with environmental problems combined with the strategic direction provided by the Governing Council, the Nairobi Declaration and Agenda 21, UNEP's Water Strategy and Policy will make a significant contribution to the quest for solutions to a range of these issues.

The Executive Director stressed that the water problems confronting us as the new millennium begins can be solved only if we muster the foresight to deal with long-term environmental problems and show the willingness to invest in our future. □