

**Chair's Summary**  
**Sub-group Meeting on Water Pollution Prevention and Ecosystem Conservation**  
**22 March 2003**

On 22 March 2003, representatives from 29 countries, and 10 intergovernmental and other organizations participated in the Sub-group Meeting on Water Pollution Prevention and Ecosystem Conservation at the Ministerial Conference held on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum in Japan. Dr. Philippe Roch, State Secretary for the Environment, Forests, and Landscape, Switzerland, chaired the meeting.

The first condition to ensure a sustainable water supply of good quality is to protect and use in a sustainable manner the ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store and release water — such as rivers, wetlands, forests, and soils. This ecosystem approach is a precondition for poverty alleviation; ecosystems are the basic infrastructure for water supply and sanitation. “Ecosystems for water, water for people, ecosystems for people.” The chair summarized the discussion as follows.

- Integrated water resources management at the watershed level (whether national or transboundary) must include the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems.
- The water cycle should be considered from the first drop falling from heaven, onto the land and mountain forests, until water reaches the sea. A higher value should be assigned to protecting and sustainably using groundwater, which accounts for 97 percent of the world's freshwater.
- The prevention of pollution must be realized at the source, by using life cycle management for products, implementing sustainable production and consumption patterns, enacting legislation, introducing economic instruments based on the polluter- or user-pay principles, and developing civil liability regimes.
- The ecosystem approach needs other innovative tools, such as the valuation of ecosystem services and the payment for ecological services. Every local, regional and international project should have an ecosystem conservation aspect. Water tax revenues should be returned to local stakeholders who take care of water resources through an ecosystem approach.
- Multistakeholders must be involved at national, regional and local levels. Ministries within a country should cooperate for proper integrated water resources management, i.e., between water and agriculture, water and industry, water and spatial planning, water and finance, etc.
- Cooperation is also needed between the public and private sectors. The public sector should define the framework to protect the environment and the interests of the poorest.
- International cooperation is crucial, through multilateral, global and regional conventions on water management, such as the Ramsar Convention on wetlands — the first convention to protect and advocate the wise use of ecosystems — as well as other conventions such as the Basel, POPs, and PIC conventions.
- Regional cooperation on a watershed level, source of potential conflicts, should be a priority to be addressed with the help of multilateral neutral institutions such as UNEP, UNECE, and ESCAP, etc.
- Due care should be given to the intertwined relationships of water and biodiversity (including the problem of alien species), water and forestry, water and agriculture, including soils, and others.
- The impact of climate change on ecosystems and the subsequent influences on the water cycle were deemed as extremely important.
- Water and culture are closely linked. Recognizing values of traditional knowledge will enhance the sustainable management of ecosystems and water resources.
- In order to manage water resources efficiently and assess the measures taken to protect ecosystems, it is important to monitor ecosystems, water resources, including groundwater, and factors affecting the availability of safe water, through reliable data collection and the use of geographical information systems (GIS).
- The contribution of the 23 UN agencies that produced the World Water Development Report should be recognized, despite some concerns about the methodology and indicators used, and such work should continue.
- The public awareness should be developed through information dissemination and education.
- Capacity building is an essential element to achieve the conservation of ecosystems and prevention of water pollution.