

IWRM.Net : Towards a European-wide exchange network for improving dissemination of Integrated Water Resources Management research outcomes

Integrated water resources management (IWRM) – the comprehensive co-ordination of water development and use – is a prerequisite for compliance with the EU's Water Framework Directive.

EU Framework Programmes have encouraged the exchange of know-how between IWRM-related research projects. But considerable resources are devoted to applied research by national and regional governments, and by water authorities, and these efforts are not currently co-ordinated in any way.

IWRM.Net will map existing research programmes and bring together their managers with a view to the creation of common, demand-driven research strategies and programmes that promise to improve greatly the speed and effectiveness of Europe's IWRM research.

Integrated water resources management (IWRM) originally focused on balancing the demands of different user groups – within a river basin, for example. Today, the concept has been extended to encompass technical and political integration, and the comprehensive co-ordination of water development and use, in order to optimise economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Within the European Union, the need to comply with the Water Framework Directive has made IWRM a priority for all water authorities, while the European Water Initiative aims similarly to encourage the governments of Third countries.

A particular target for integration is to overcome the traditional separation between the water policy, water resource management and scientific communities. This affects the setting of research priorities and the free flow of results to managers and policy-makers, leading to variable delays in the socially beneficial exploitation of the latest science – water management policy is often based on current and well-established knowledge and technology for lowering risks. In many cases, scientists are not always fully aware of the real needs of users, while users are unaware of the technical alternatives available or nearly available.

Successive EU Research Framework Programmes have done much to stimulate the creation of clusters designed to facilitate cross-fertilisation between complementary IWRM-related research projects.

But national ministries, water authorities and regional governments all finance significant applied research programmes to support the implementation of their policies, as do NATO, UN agencies and international NGOs.

Currently, no mechanism exists that can provide an overview of these very considerable efforts, or of their results. But there is known to be considerable duplication of effort, while anecdotal evidence suggests frequent mismatches between the funded research and the real needs of practitioners. In particular, the scientific community is poorly equipped to provide the immediate, cross-disciplinary solutions required by water managers who, in turn, fail to appreciate the necessity of ongoing basic research.

This is the aim of the European Commission ERA-Net programme to overcome these difficulties.

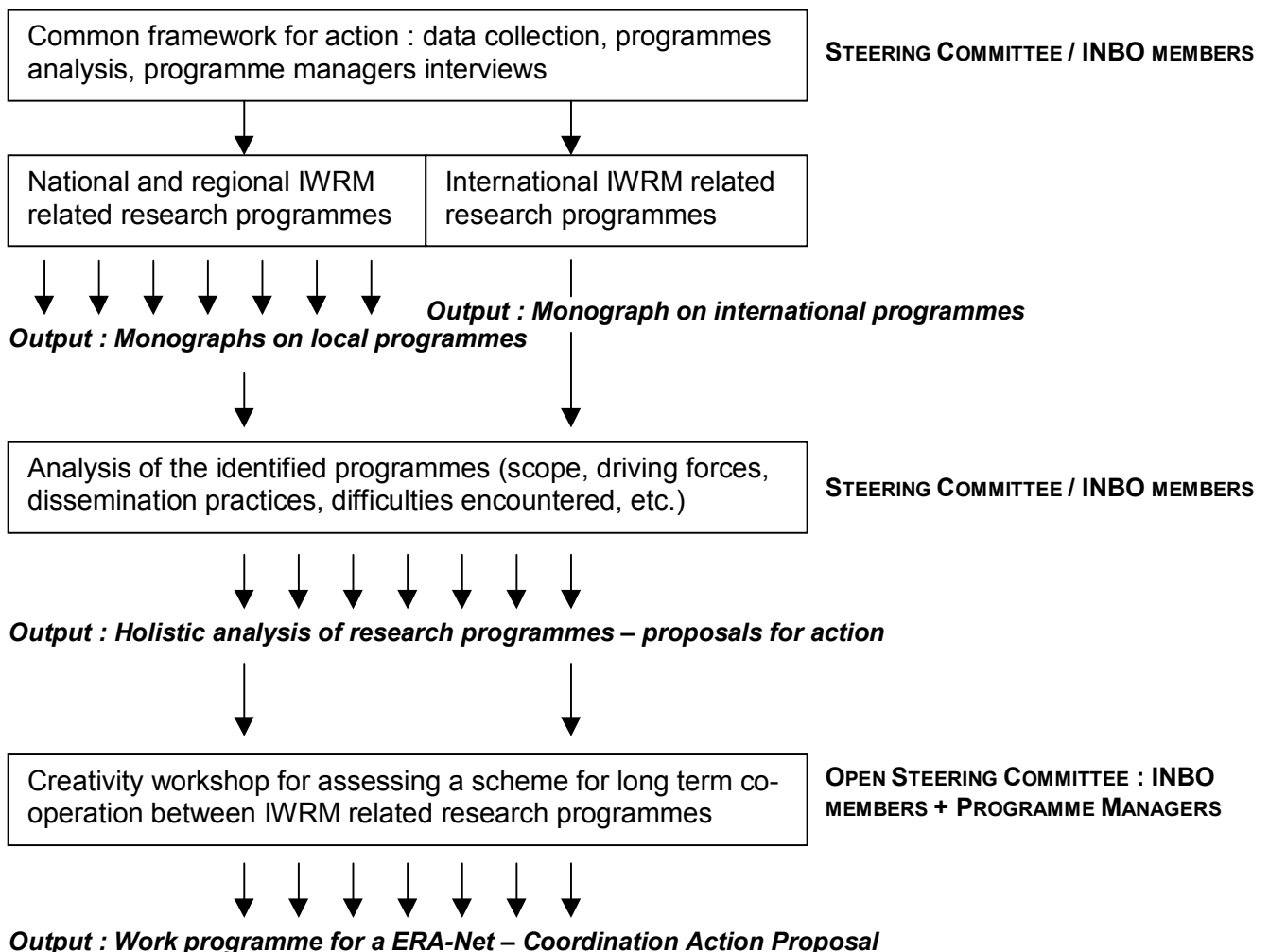
The project :

Led by the Office International de l'Eau (OIEau) and the International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO), the ERA-NET Specific support action IWRM.Net has set out to map national and regional IWRM-related research programmes in 15 countries throughout the enlarged EU-25. This is the first step towards the preparation of a demand-driven, bottom-up proposal for a full five-year ERA-NET project, whose aim will be the co-ordination and mutual opening of local programmes in pursuit of the common objectives established by the Water Framework Directive and the European Water Initiative.

INBO will create a steering committee initially made up of research programme managers from eight of its member countries (participants have still to be confirmed) – France (Ministry for Environment), Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain (CH Jucar) from among the current EU Member States, and the Czech Republic, Poland (Ministry for Environment) and Romania (Apele Romane) from the Accession countries,. But this is by no means a closed group, and the managers of programmes in up to ten additional countries are expected to join the committee as work progresses.

Based on a holistic analysis of reports on the research programmes in about 15+ country, the steering committee will formulate proposals for action to realise inter-programme synergies, and to improve the flow of exploitable results to water resource managers. It will invite around 50 research programme managers – as well as the leaders of European academic networks and research clusters – to discuss these proposals at a brainstorming workshop. Their conclusions will determine the structure and *modus operandi* of the exchange and collaboration network to be established by the follow-up ERA-NET project.

IWRM.NET : WORKING PROCEDURES



IWRM.Net has adopted an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses the social sciences and economics as well as scientific and technical aspects. It aims to develop mutual understanding of research needs, programmes and practices between countries and regions, in the context of a holistic structure involving programme managers, researchers and water resource managers and users.

By identifying and bringing together the managers of national and regional IWRM research programmes, it hopes to kick-start a process of co-operation and the mutual opening of programmes from which all will benefit – and which will lead eventually to fuller integration of European IWRM research strategies and funding.

This 9-month project is supported by the European Commission – Directorate General Research, within the scheme for implementing the European Research Area (ERA). The budget (EUR 180,000) will cover the local surveys, the meetings of the Steering Committee and the organisation of the workshop.