

EMWIS Secretary General

World Water Forum

Mexico

“EURO-MEDITERRANEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM ON KNOW-HOW IN THE WATER SECTOR”

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slide 1 – cover slide

First of all, allow me to thank CONAGUA and the International Office of Water for inviting EMWIS to present the Mediterranean experience in this session. The Euro-Mediterranean Information System on know-how in the Water sector is exemplary in the field of Integrated Water Resources Management in the Mediterranean countries.

Slide 2 – Water and risk

As some of you may not be familiar with the Mediterranean region, let me give you some information in order to clarify the context. Water is a major consideration in the Mediterranean area because it is a scarce, fragile and unevenly-distributed resource: two thirds of the resources are found in one fifth of the basin. The population suffering from water scarcity (less than 1000 cubic metres per inhabitant per year) amounts to 108 million people and could reach 165 million in 2025, with 63 million beneath the drought threshold (less than 500 cubic metres per inhabitant per year). The quality of water is also threatened by the numerous pollutants discharged into fresh water, which raises tensions over resources and increases the cost of access to healthy water. We should also underline the fact that 27 million Mediterranean dwellers do not have an adequate sanitation system.

Thus in the Mediterranean area, the main risks are of three types:

- periods of water scarcity difficult to predict with an increasing water demand,
- strong and very localised rainfalls giving place to dramatic floods
- the pollution of the thin resources available by rejections and mineralisation

In the Mediterranean, the use of new information and communication technologies are implemented for various types of applications, sometimes combined:

- Exchanging of know-how and training, as for example the MEDROPLAN project (MEDA-Water) that proposes guidance and training for the management of the drought in the Mediterranean countries;
- Information systems for the public and the decision makers supported by maps of risk areas
- Simulations allowing to implement different scénarii for crisis management
- Measurement systems and early warning indicators for the risk prevention

Let us now turn to EMWIS.

Slide 3 – Water in the Euro-Med Partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Local Water Management, which took place in Marseille in 1996, resulted in an initial prudent approach towards a new era of cooperation between the Member States of the European Union

and the 12 Mediterranean Partner countries. This was the first conference dedicated to a specific subject in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership created in 1995 by the Declaration of Barcelona.

It was agreed that a common need exists to improve practice in local water management, and the sharing of information on water was selected as the first area for joint work. Thus EMWIS was launched. The structure, programme of work and budget of the system were approved one year later in Naples, where the Director Generals' Conference adopted the system not only as an instrument for the exchange of information but also as a means of allowing closer cooperation between the partners, which constitutes a major advantage.

The Naples decision was emblematic with respect to the spirit of the partnership and contributes to the development of greater mutual confidence in the Region concerned. Water is in fact not only the source of life and of socio-economic development but also, unfortunately, of tensions. We succeeded in creating a network which brings together all the countries of the Middle East who are involved in the peace process. EMWIS is thus making its modest contribution to the common search for lasting peace.

The Turin Ministerial Conference in October 1999 gave new vigour to the spirit of cooperation, with the definition of an Action Plan for local water management in the Mediterranean area. This Plan gave rise to a funding program of 40 million euros, launched by the European Commission under the name MEDA-WATER, to support approximately ten regional model projects. EMWIS serves here as a vector for the dissemination of the information and expertise which result from these initiatives.

Thus EMWIS became operational in the autumn of 1999, with its Technical Unit and the implementation of national sites by the partner countries.

All the Water Directors of the countries concerned, which today number 35, meet periodically to evaluate the progress made and to define new strategic priorities, as in Madrid in 2001 and more recently in Rome.

Slide 4 - Architecture

From the organisational point of view, EMWIS is supported by a Steering Committee and a number of National Focal Points working in close cooperation with a Technical Unit which plays a dual role of assistance provider and International Focal Point. One of its major characteristics, which made the System a success and promoted its adoption by the countries, is its management mode which is totally decentralised by using the Internet. Another major feature is the rationalisation of access to information, with unique access points per country.

This exemplary approach was underlined in Kyoto in 2003 at the 3rd World Water Forum, and has been followed in other parts of the world: in Central

Europe with the Aquadoc-Inter system, in Africa with AWIS and in Latin America with Siagua.

Slide 5 - NFP

Today, a large number of Mediterranean countries, whether members of the European Union or partners, have a web site dedicated to collecting, organising and disseminating information on the local management of water resources and ways of improving the skills and training of specialised personnel, administrators and decision-makers. A shared electronic network dedicated to water is a reality and has led to the formulation of high-level, stricter standards for the exchange of information.

Some twenty National Focal Points have been created and their important work of organisation and rationalisation in such a vital sector has commenced. Interest has grown steadily and joint activities have been undertaken. Thanks to the particularly useful help of the European Commission, the basic work of the Technical Unit has enabled a vast common framework to be created, extending from the East to the West and from the North to the South of the Mediterranean. A common programme is in existence.

Not only does EMWIS exist, but it has also engendered additional expectations and more ambitious targets have been defined.

Slide 6 - Priorities

Thus, at the recent conference of Euro-Mediterranean Water Directors, a ten-year strategy was established and new priorities defined:

- Developing and reinforcing National Water Information Systems so that each country can have access to reliable information to improve the governance and integrated management of water resources. Some of this information may be disseminated over the public network of the EMWIS Focal Point
- Continuing to promote and develop EMWIS as a Regional Information System
- Creating a water observation mechanism for the Mediterranean area in order to monitor indicators for the achievement of millennium targets relating to water and sanitation in the region, together with implementation of the Water segment of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, based on data supplied by national water information systems where these exist
- Encouraging transfer of knowledge through North-South and South-North exchanges on Integrated Water Resources Management and extreme phenomena such as droughts and floods, and by making better use of the results of the many projects supported by the European Union
- Organising a network of institutional decision-makers in the water sector, Water Directors in particular, in order to encourage dialogue and ensure the consistency of strategies when necessary

I hope this short presentation on water information sharing in the Mediterranean region has illustrated the essential need to improve the use of information systems on water and aquatic environments in order to enhance Integrated Water Resources Management. During the discussion, representatives of the EMWIS Focal Points will be able to provide more details about their activities.

Slide 7 – Contact details

I invite you to consult the EMWIS web site in order to find further information.

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