

NATIONAL WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT POLICY

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National Water Resources Management Policy

1. THE VISION

National Water Resources Management Policy envisions “A society that values the sustainable use of water resources and recognizes the goal of a balanced environment conducive to social and economic development”.

2. THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT POLICY

Water is an essential ingredient for existence of all living beings. When Sri Lanka had a predominantly rural, agro based economy with few industries and only a limited population Integrated Water Resources Management was not a pressing issue. In the more recent past, however, this picture has changed dramatically. Demand for water in every economic sphere is increasing with an unhealthy competition resulting in an unregulated exploitation threatening depletion and degradation of quantity and quality of a resource.

With the transformation of the agrarian society into an urban society, the main issue that the water sector is faced with is to meet the growing sectorial water demands i.e. domestic, industrial, irrigation agriculture and hydropower while maintaining a minimum flow to sustain the ecological health of our water bodies.

Competition among water users, lack of compliance on the part of the pollution control, poor land use policy is threatening critical watersheds. Lack of data and information for real time water planning is a setback for equitable and timely water allocation. Absence of a legal basis to safeguard water rights discourages promotion of user commitment for protection and conservation. Degradation of river environment due to activities such as sand and clay mining, waste dumping are major issues causing threat to the cleanliness of water resources and streams.

Opportunities for development of water resources are very scarce, very expensive, and fraught with socio-environmental issues. Hence it is urgent to introduce legislation to develop water resources and efficient water management system for the country.

The present legal provisions are scattered across a number of legal enactments implemented through functional agencies have no proper coordination among those institutions and there is no integrated water resources management approach to deal with the present situations.

The National Water Resources Management Policy therefore needs to adopt effective measures to regulate water allocations, prepare plans for integrated water resources development, management and conservation of water resources.

3. SCOPE

The National Water Resources Management Policy applies only to fresh, brackish and rain water waters of Sri Lanka; Marine waters are excluded from this policy.

4. PRINCIPLES

The National Water Resources Management Policy is based on the following principles:

- 4.1 Water is a basic need including all living beings
- 4.2 Water is limited resource.
- 4.3 Water for domestic and sanitary needs will be given priority in allocating water from existing resources, developing and managing new water resources
- 4.4 River Basin and connected basins will be the hydrological unit for planning and management of water resources
- 4.5 Priorities will be recognized in line with the national priorities.
- 4.6 Ground water extraction will be monitored and appropriately regulated through the relevant institutions in ground water sensitive areas.
- 4.7 Management of water resources will be devolved or decentralized as provided in the Constitution.
- 4.8 All developers including state agencies need to obtain the approval from the institution, which will be established for water resources management for development of water resources and integrated approach is to be adopted.
- 4.9 The State will promote the integration of gender concerns in policies, plans and programmes in water sector activities.
- 4.10 *The water resources will be developed and preserved based on the national priorities and such institutions and stakeholders involve in this process will be recognized.***

5. OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the National water Resources Management policy is to encourage Integrated Water Resources development and management, to ensure that the national water resources are conserved and efficiently managed and equitably allocated among all stakeholders to meet socio economic and environmental needs of the present and future generations.

In reaching the overall goal, the Policy is intended to:

- 5.1 Facilitate national development.
- 5.2 Ensure the water security of the nation;
- 5.3 Conserve and recognize the value of the scarce water resources.
- 5.4 Ensure flexible water allocation criteria, which will promote social harmony among competing uses;
- 5.5 Recognise water rights of current and new users;
- 5.6 Promote adherence to standards in the maintenance of water quality of all water sources required for various water users;
- 5.7 Promote sustainable management and development of both surface and ground water resources.
- 5.8 Ensure that national, provincial and local interests are harmonized in the management of water resources.
- 5.9 Ensure water allocation for irrigated agriculture for nations' food security.
- 5.10 Conserve develops and manages catchments areas and watersheds to ensure optimum land use in relation to social well-being.
- 5.11 Encourage public private partnerships in the management of the water resources.

6. POLICY STRATEGY

6.1 Ownership

All water resources including rainwater surface and ground water in Sri Lanka is a public asset.

6.2 Water Rights

- 6.2.1 Riparian rights, prior rights and customary rights to water will be recognized.
- 6.2.2 Water rights will be transferable subject to regulation and zoning stipulations based on national interest.

6.2.3 Appropriate mechanism will be used to regulate large-scale water users in order to safeguard small-scale users.

6.2.4 Third party rights to water will be recognized.

6.3 Role of the State

6.3.1 Being the owner facilitates development of water resources to the extent possible.

6.3.2 Foster participatory approach as a key principal in conservation, development and management of all water resources in a sustainable manner.

6.3.3 Promote open and transparent approaches in all its endeavours in managing the nations' water resources and water rights of the people.

6.3.4 Ensure adequate water for environment and social needs at all times.

6.3.5 Establish policy, legal and institutional framework for Integrated Water Resources Management.

6.3.6 Plan and implement National Water Resources Management mechanism for water resources management and development in the country.

6.4 Development and Management

Based on water resources issues and management needs and on the recommendation of the institution responsible for water resources management, areas will be declared. Comprehensive sustainable water resources management plans will be formulated through identification of distinctive characteristics specific to different zones and areas.

6.5 Conservation

All measures will be taken to minimize excessive use of water through demand management and to promote economic efficiency and accountability of water use in all sectors. Watershed management through extensive soil conservation, catchments area protection, preservation of forest and increasing forest cover will be promoted.

The National Water Resources Management Policy recognizes the importance of water quality management and will introduce anti degradation measures to minimise contamination of water bodies due to point and diffused sources of pollution.

6.6 Water Allocation

The system of water allocation will be based on a participatory decision making process representing all stakeholders with technical input on optimal operation for meeting anticipated seasonal and multi-seasonal water demands for various regions and sectors, and the environment

Allocation of water among different users will be in accordance with the water resources management plans prepared for the each river basin region, river basin or aquifer. River Basin Committees (RBC) will process and monitor requests from the eligible users for allocation with the guidelines of the institution responsible water resources management. In doing so, they will ensure efficient and equitable water allocations among stakeholders including provisions for environmental requirements.

6.7. Data and Information Management

A well developed system for water related data for planning and management of the water resources will be established by the Institution responsible for Water resources management and regulation with proper coordination with other partner agencies.

7. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The National water resources Management policy provides a three tier institutional arrangement to be responsible for its implementation, namely, National Water Resources Management Authority (NWRA), National Water Resources Management Council (NWRC) and the Water Resources Management Tribunal (WRT)

8. INTER AGENCY CO-ORDINATION

Based on the guidance and recommendations of the Water Resources Management Council the institution responsible for implementing water resources Management policy will be the National Water Resources Management Authority. In doing so proper coordination mechanism will maintained with other partner agencies and stakeholders by the NWRA.

9. AWARENESS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The NWRA in exercising its mandate will promote research, training and capacity building of water sector agencies to meet IWRM goals. Facilitate mobilising partner institutions such as Universities, Research organizations, Govt. departments, private sector institutions and NGOO for consultation and awareness to promote stakeholder commitment for water resources management. NWRA will commission water related research.