

**PROTOCOL
MEETING OF THE REGIONAL WORKING GROUP (RWG)
ON WATER QUALITY**

Venue:	Innovations Cluster, Tashkent City, Uzbekistan
Date:	February 5, 2019
Organizer:	CAREC within the framework of the Blue Peace Central Asia Project
Meeting goal:	The Meeting was held to finalize the Mandate of the Regional Working Group (RWG) on Water Quality, and develop and agree upon the 2019-2020 Work Plan of the Group.
Brief Meeting contents, outcomes, agreements, achievements	<p>Ms. Ekaterina Strikeleva, Acting Manager of the CAREC Water Initiatives Support (WIS) Program, opened the Meeting. In her address, Ms. Strikeleva extended gratitude to SDC for its financial support of the RWG Meeting under the Blue Peace Central Asia Initiative as well as informed those present about SDC's readiness to sponsor RWG meetings in 2019-2020.</p> <p>Mr. Sokhib Akramov, SDC Representative, and Mr. Tailabek Makeyev, UNECE Representative, also addressed the participants with welcoming speeches.</p> <p>Mr. Akramov expressed the interest on behalf of SDC to cooperate on water quality within the framework of the Blue Peace Central Asia Project.</p> <p>Mr. Makeyev reported on UNECE activities, its collaboration on water quality with CAREC as well as expressed hope that the efforts of all partners, including SDC with its Blue Peace Central Asia Initiative, will help advancing water quality cooperation.</p> <p>Ms. Strikeleva noted that Turkmenistan's representatives were absent in the Meeting due to the ongoing reorganization of the government agencies in Turkmenistan. Therefore, all Meeting documents, i.e. its Protocol, RWG Mandate and the 2019-2020 Work Plan shall be officially referred to Turkmenistan's nominees to the RWG.</p> <p>The Meeting covered the following issues as per the Meeting Agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion and official assignment of the Regional Working Group Mandate; 2. Review of activities by Central Asian (CA) countries on water quality: trends in developing water resources quality monitoring systems and structural changes, review of collaborations on water quality; 3. Discussion of outcomes of projects on water resources quality; 4. Discussion and forging of the 2019-2020 RWG Work Plan. <p>In the beginning of the Meeting, Ms. Strikeleva reported on the results of the joint UNECE/CAREC initiative to strengthen cooperation on water quality in Central Asia launched in 2008. The Regional Working Group (RWG) on water quality comprised of officially nominated representatives of national hydrometeorological services, sanitary and epidemiologic, environmental and water agencies/ministries of 5 CA countries regularly convenes since 2016. The adoption of the RWG Mandate will make it possible to discuss the expansion of the RWG membership.</p> <p>The first joint (Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan) pilot interventions on water quality took place in the Talas River Basin in 2012. They allowed approving the methodology</p>

of joint monitoring. Under the 2018 RWG Work Plan, in September 2018 a study tour to Uzbekistan's Hydrometeorological Service was held to investigate the methodology of the hydrobiological water quality analysis. Concluding, Ms. Strikeleva noted that regional cooperation on water quality is a rather complicated and time-consuming process, yet the suitable conditions for forging a platform for water quality collaborations are already in place.

However, it should be noted that so far all practical actions were pilot and did not receive any follow-up. The same is true for joint monitoring and the offered uniform methodology of selecting the coordinated parameters.

Discussion and official assignment of Regional Working Group Mandate. Mr. Ruslan Melian, an international expert, presented the proposed Mandate of the Regional Working Group and RWG Provisions. Initially, two documents were drafted, i.e. the Mandate – as a policy document, and the Provisions – as a proceedings document (mechanisms of the RWG establishment and operation). At the Meeting, it was proposed to consolidate the two documents within the Mandate and for the international expert to amend the document accordingly. It was noted that at present the RWG operates within the framework of a project and that its meetings depend on project funding. Thus, it was suggested to consider the possibility of attaching the RWG to an international/regional organization (IFAS, ISDC, SPECA or other). However, no decision on this matter was made during the Meeting.

Mandate approval. The two following options were proposed as to approving the RWG Mandate:

1. Coordination on the level of national ministries;
2. Coordination on the level of authorized (nominated) RWG Members.

The present RWG Members on behalf of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan unanimously agreed that the Mandate's coordination on the level of departments was not required, and that the Mandate shall be subject for approval by the nominated RWG Members.

RWG Membership. RWG Membership shall be secured based on nominations by official ministries/departments of CA countries. Replacement of RWG Members shall be done based on official letters.

Due to the fact that the representatives of Turkmenistan were absent at the Meeting, the RWG Mandate should be referred to Turkmenistan's RWG Members via an official letter.

CAREC was proposed to perform the role of RWG Secretariat. All Meeting participants supported the idea.

Since the RWG is an advisory body, Mr. Makeyev proposed to invite NGO representatives to become RWG members. Another proposal was to engage other agencies working on water quality (incl. emergency departments), experts, etc.

The Meeting participants decided to invite representatives of NGOs, emergency and other agencies as observers, participants and speakers to the following RWG Meetings as necessary.

Based on the general discussion, it was decided to modify the text of the draft Mandate in accordance with approved comments within 10 days (deadline of February 15, 2019) and disseminate it among RWG Members, including those representing Turkmenistan, by e-mail. In case of receiving no further comments from RWG

Members before February 28, 2019, the Mandate shall be deemed officially approved by the Regional Working Group.

Review of activities by Central Asian countries on water quality. During the session, country representatives reported on the trends in deploying national water quality monitoring systems, corresponding structural changes, and reviewed the overall development of cooperation on water quality.

Ms. Alimbayeva, Kazakhstan’s representative, noted that to improve the assessment of surface water quality since January 1, 2019 RSE “Kazhydromet” has been applying a new regulation (Uniform System for Water Quality Classification in Water Bodies) in its surface water quality assessment system. The regulation was developed on the basis of the European Water Directive and other international surface water quality standards, and was approved as per Order №151 of Chairman of Water Resources Committee under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan of November 9, 2016.

The new regulation takes account of the requirements associated with the main water use categories like fishery, economic and drinking water supply, recreation, irrigation, and industry. The classification of surface water quality based on the numerical values of new standards allows estimating the level of chemical pollution of water bodies. The Kazakhstan’s representative also noted the progress of bilateral cooperation with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

International cooperation with the Republic of Uzbekistan is carried out as per the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on cooperation in environmental protection and rational environmental management of June 2, 1997 and the Strategy of Economic Cooperation between the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2019 signed during the visit of Mr. Sh. M. Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, to Kazakhstan.

During September 27-28, 2018, the 1st Meeting of the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan Joint Working Group (JWG) on Environmental Protection and Water Quality in the Syr Darya River Basin took place in Tashkent City, Uzbekistan. The meeting outcomes included signing the corresponding protocol and a series of relevant documents, Provisions and 2018-2020 JWG Work Plan. At present, the countries are drafting the Detailed Work Plan.

International cooperation with the Kyrgyz Republic is carried out as per the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic via two working groups (WG):

- WG on Environmental Protection (Resolution of the 20th Meeting of the Chu-Talas Water Commission);
- WG on Climate Change Adaptation and Long-Term Action Programs.

The priority tasks of the working groups include the following: mainstreaming of standards on surface water quality assessment; development and deployment of a coordinated surface water quality monitoring program; performance of coordinated water sample collection and testing and information exchange in the basins of the Chu and Talas Rivers, etc.

The Meeting participants requested Kazakhstan representative to make a detailed presentation on the newly accepted Uniform System for Water Quality Classification in Water Bodies and methods of identifying the classes of water bodies.

In her presentation, **Ms. Bondareva, Kyrgyzhydromet's representative**, dwelled on several new documents regulating water relations and the quality of water resources enacted in Kyrgyzstan since 2016. She also noted the recent trend of expanding monitoring coverage. Under its working program, since 2014 the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has been carrying out regular transboundary monitoring in the Chu and Kara-Balta River Basins, and since 2018 has renewed the monitoring in the Talas River Basin. Since 2018, in order to obtain more objective information on water quality in monitored water bodies Kyrgyzhydromet has initiated monthly observations. Prior to that, water sampling was done 4 times a year.

Ultimately, Kyrgyzhydromet plans to introduce hydrobiological monitoring to ensure operational assessment of qualitative and quantitative changes with the account of ongoing pressure on water ecosystems, including transboundary waterways.

Kyrgyzstan's representative noted the successful advancement of transboundary cooperation with the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Chu-Talas River Basin.

Mr. Khomitov, Tajikistan's representative, reported on the water quality monitoring system in Sughd Region, including the opening of new laboratories fitted with modern water quality assessment equipment.

Ms. Yarullina, Uzbekistan's representative, pointed to the increasing attention Uzbekistan is paying to water quality as well as better cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the matter. Inter alia, she expressed gratitude to CAREC Country Office in Uzbekistan and, in particular, Ms. Shakhnoza Umarova for assistance in organizing the Meeting of the Bilateral Inter-Agency Working Group (September 27-28, 2018). In her report, Ms. Yarullina noted that so far only two countries are discussing water quality issues in the Syr Darya River Basin and that it is necessary to engage other stakeholder countries – up until present, all attempts to involve all countries sharing the watershed in the discussions were in vain.

Ms. Yarullina also highlighted the need for sufficient financial support to ensure regular meetings, publishing reports, and conducting research.

Further on during the Meeting, the outcomes of several international projects on water quality were presented.

Mr. Zaitov reported on the outputs of the PEER Research Project “The Impact of Climate Change on Water Quality in the Amu Darya River” noting the difficulties with data collection that affected the overall project design. The initial project aim was rather ambitious – collecting data based on 12 indicators. Yet, later it appeared impossible to accomplish the task, and the project team worked with only 3 indicators. The final results will be presented after project completion within the final project report.

The Meeting participants expressed their interest in receiving the final project outputs.

Ms. Akbozova reported on the results of the UNDP project in the Chu-Talas River Basin aimed at bilateral water quality monitoring in the Chu (Shu), Talas and Asa Rivers. The Working Group on Environmental Protection (WG EP) under the Secretariat of the Chu-Talas Water Commission was established as per the Resolution of 20th Meeting of the Commission (Issyk-Kul Region) on September 18, 2015.

	<p>Surface water quality assessment in the Chu-Talas River Basin utilized the basin approach. River basins are conditionally divided into three parts: upper, mid and lower streams. In 2018, as per Paragraph 3 of the Protocol of the 5th WG EP Meeting (August 23, 2017) the Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan members of the WG EP agreed to perform the coordinated monitoring of the transboundary Chu, Karabalta and Talas Rivers as well as exchange data on water quality (17 components) between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Kazakhstan. Sampling, sample transportation and physical and chemical water analysis were carried out according to the national standards of both countries. The outcomes of this joint effort were presented at the 7th WG EP Meeting (December 13, 2018) in Taraz (Kazakhstan). Also, it was formally decided to draft the Regulations of Coordinated Monitoring in the Chu-Talas River Basin and submit it for review at the regular 25th Meeting of the Commission scheduled to take place in March-April 2019.</p> <p>All meeting materials (protocols and presentations) are available at the Commission's website (www.chui.at.kg).</p> <p>The Meeting participants noted the need to conduct the comparative analysis of the methodologies for classifying water bodies developed under the UNDP project in the Chu-Talas River Basin and the one introduced in Kazakhstan.</p> <p>Mr. Makeyev noted that the regional-level collaborations on surface water quality have been supported under joint UNECE/CAREC projects since 2009. In 2019-2020, this cooperation is planned to continue within the framework of a new project aimed at joint monitoring in 1 or 2 transboundary river basins in Central Asia and enhancing transboundary data- and information exchange among CA countries.</p> <p>The WG EP plans to continue its efforts on the coordinated water quality monitoring in the Chu-Talas Basin as well as building the capacity of the Working Group, Chu-Talas Water Commission and designated agencies (departments) via training and twinning events, including by learning other advanced practices of transboundary water quality monitoring across the UNECE region and disseminating the experiences in other watersheds. These works are planned for 2019-2022.</p>
<p>Discussion of the 2019-2020 Work Plan</p>	<p>The following thematic directions of work were identified during the brainstorming regarding the 2019-2020 RWG Work Plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity building and exchange of experience; 2. Executing pilot projects on water quality monitoring on transboundary water bodies; 3. Data- and information exchange. <p>The detailed 2019-2020 Work Plan will be drafted based on the discussions in the Meeting and distributed among RWG Members for review.</p>
<p>Conclusions, decisions, recommendations</p>	<p>Meeting resolutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merge the RWG Mandate and Provisions into a single document. The document shall be modified based on the comments from the Meeting participants within 10 days of the Meeting not later than February 15, 2019 and shall be referred to RWG Members for feedback; • The RWG Mandate shall be approved by the nominated RWG Members; • The RWG Mandate shall be deemed approved by the Regional Working Group after incorporating the final comments received no later than February 28, 2019; • Charge CAREC with the functions of RWG Secretariat; • Hold RWG meetings on a rotation basis;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign the authority of the RWG Meeting Chairperson to the RWG Member representing the hosting country also on a rotation basis; • Include into the next meeting agenda the presentation about the new method of classifying water bodies on behalf of Kazakhstan; • When developing the Work Plan consider the capacities of ongoing and planned projects in the field of water quality.
<p>Next RWG Meeting</p>	<p>It was decided to hold the next RWG Meeting in Khojand, Tajikistan, in the second half of August, 2019. All meeting participants will be disseminated information about the final venue and time of the 6th RWG Meeting 1.5-2 months in advance.</p>

AGENDA
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February 5, 2019

Time	Session/Presentation	Reporter
09.30 – 10.00	Registration of participants	
10.00 – 10.20	Welcoming words	SDC representative UNECE representative <i>Ms. Ekaterina Strikeleva, CAREC</i>
10.20 – 10.40	The outcomes of the joint UNECE/CAREC initiative on strengthening cooperation on water quality in Central Asia	<i>Ms. Ekaterina Strikeleva,</i> Smart Waters Project Manager
10.40 – 11.00	Discussion and official assignment of the Mandate of the Regional Working Group <i>General discussion, comments from RWG Members</i>	<i>Mr. Ruslan Melian,</i> Science Coordinator, EKOS Strategic Environmental Research Center
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break	
11.30 – 13.00	The analysis of the activities on water quality by CA countries, including finding answers to the following questions: - what trends as to water quality management are observed in each target country; - what structural changes in agencies engaged in water quality monitoring and management are observed; - review of cooperation progress on regional and international level, including bi- and multi-lateral agreements. <i>Presentations (5-7 minutes each)</i> Drafting the matrix of mutually interesting pilot actions on water quality in CA countries <i>General discussion</i>	<i>Experts from 5 Central Asian Countries; moderated by CAREC</i>
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch	
14.00 – 15.00	Presentations by the representatives of international programs and initiatives on their water quality efforts	<i>International partners</i>
15.00 – 15.30	Discussion and drafting of the RWG Annual Work Plan for 2019 <i>Small group discussions</i>	<i>RWG Members;</i> <i>moderated by CAREC</i>
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee break	
16.00 – 17.00	Discussion and drafting of the RWG Annual Work Plan for 2019 <i>Group presentations and general discussion</i>	<i>RWG Members;</i> <i>moderated by CAREC</i>
17.00 – 17.30	Meeting closure, Q&A	



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List of Participants
Meeting of the Regional Working Group (RWG) on Water Quality
Tashkent City, February 5, 2019

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3	Ms. Gulbarshin Serikovna Bekbenbetova	RSE “Kazhydromet”	Chief Engineer of the Environmental Monitoring Department	guli.serikovna@gmail.com
Kyrgyz Republic				
4	Ms. Vera Andreyevna Bondareva	Hydrometeorology Department with the Ministry of Emergencies of the Kyrgyz Republic	Head of the Surface Land Water Pollution Monitoring Department	+ 0777900417, 316441, bondareva@meteo.kg
Republic of Tajikistan				
5	Mr. Zarif Khalimov	Environmental Committee with the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan	Chief Specialist of the Center for Environmental Information	zarif5555@mail.ru
6	Mr. Abduvali Khomitov	Hydrometeorology Agency of the Republic of Tajikistan	Head of Sughd Region Meteorological Center	avali71@mail.ru + 918867625
7	Mr. Kholmurod Alichonov	Ministry of Health of the Republic of Tajikistan	Senior Specialist of the Hygiene and Children and Teenager Hygiene Department of the State Health and Social Protection Service	alijonov_khol@mail.ru
Republic of Uzbekistan				
8	Mr. Zokir Ishpulatov	Ministry of Water Management of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Department Head	
9	Ms. Marina Plotsen	Hydrometeorological Service Center with the Ministry of	HSC Head	

		Emergencies of the Republic of Uzbekistan		
10	Ms. Zulfiya Yarullina	State Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Office Deputy Director	
11	Ms. O. Mirshina	Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Department Head	
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)				
12	Mr. Sokhib Akramov	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	Global Programme Water Regional Coordinator	sohib.akramov@eda.admin.ch + 998 71 120 54 54
Experts/Speakers				
14	Mr. Ruslan Melian	EKOS Strategic Environmental Research Center (Republic of Moldova)	Science Coordinator	rmelian@rambler.ru
15	Ms. Indira Turebayevna Akbozova	Secretariat of Kazakhstan Part of the Chu-Talas Water Commission	Head	shutalaskz@gmail.com
16	Mr. Sherzod Zaitov	PEER Project	Expert	sherzodzaitov@gmail.com
17	Mr. Talaibek Makeyev	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	Environment Office	talaibek.makeev@un.org
CAREC				
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