

**Opening statement by the Norwegian State Secretary of the Norwegian Ministry of Environment,
Mr Lars Andreas Lunde
at the Third Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health.**

Oslo, 25 November 2013

Equitable access to drinking water and sanitation

The importance of water

- Water is a prerequisite for life – for humans and for all other living organisms on earth. At the same time, only 1 % of the world's water is usable to humans. About 97 % is salty water, and 2 % is frozen in glaciers and polar ice caps. The remaining 1% of the world's water supply is therefore a precious commodity that should not be taken for granted.
- Water is also of great importance for life quality – it forms landscapes, gives our experience of nature an extra dimension, and is essential for recreation, swimming, fishing, tourism and for different kinds of outdoor water activities. Water – and the access to it – is important in rural and urban areas and all over the world.
- Water, and especially the access to drinking water, is also a source to major conflicts – both between countries and between different user groups around the world. Climate change contributes to increased challenges in many areas, both in the areas of the world experiencing increased draught incidents, and in the areas that have heavier and more frequent rainfalls due to climate change.
- The Ministry for the Environment is responsible for coordination of the work on overall water management in Norway through the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive. The main objective is to achieve good water quality or the potential for good water quality in all water bodies. This is a challenging work that we give high priority. We cooperate with all relevant sectors in setting environmental targets, making plans and carry out measures to improve water quality. As the responsible Ministry for the Norwegian pollution control act, we also implement regulations and other action to protect water bodies against pollution.

From this introduction, I will go on to share some of the ministry's experience from work related to drinking water in Norway.

- In Norway, the strategy for securing good quality of drinking water has traditionally been divided between improvement of water supply systems and protection of water sources. About 90% of our drinking water is supplied by open water bodies and only 10% is from ground water sources. Due to improved quality of water in some of the rivers and lakes supplying drinking water, the strategy has gradually been shifted towards **improvements in the supply systems**.

- Milder winters and more rain in recent years, has periodically reduced the water quality in many lakes. Intake water to treatment plants has therefore been more influenced by discharges and runoff than before. We have met this challenge with **improvements in water treatment inside our plants**, as the protection of water sources in Norway is more difficult and costly than technical treatment.

- Challenges we have met lately:

For Norway it has become increasingly evident that the constant paving of surfaces over the last 50 years, especially in towns and suburban areas, is a major threat to the water bodies. A warmer climate adds to this process, and the results are:

- **Dramatic increase in water run-off**, introducing more particles and pollution into water bodies. In town centers input of bacteria is regularly recorded.
- More frequent **overloads of wastewater systems** with associated overflow to surface areas and water bodies, introducing a potential conflict with i.a. bathing.

- Identified needs for improved technical solutions for:

- **Wastewater treatment.** In Norway, some 20% of the population lives in houses without connection to public wastewater treatment. A significant number of families also have cottages/summer houses.
- **Reduction in volume and intensity of storm water** in order to reduce overflow from wastewater systems and possible health conflicts
- **Conflicting user needs** between irrigation, drinking water for animals and discharges

- The process has given us a good opportunity to reevaluate our scientific base, discuss new aspects and how to approach new problems. I have been informed that other Parties to the Protocol have gone through similar discussions, and I am glad that Norway has had the opportunity to support the process in some of the countries, including hosting regional meetings.
- Cooperation between committed Parties is a key prerequisite for good water management. In this meeting, you will have the opportunity to exchange views and information on common challenges and how they may be solved.
- Hopefully, this will improve our common management of the water resources, and I therefore extend to you my best wishes for this meeting and your important deliberations here in Oslo.