Water Convention and other UNECE multi-lateral environmental agreements

Dr Annukka Lipponen
Water Convention secretariat, UNECE
The Water Convention:

Main objective:

Foster cooperation over transboundary waters in order to ensure that they are sustainably and equitably managed.

Water Convention Key Principles:

- Principle of prevention
- Principle of equitable and reasonable utilization
- Principle of cooperation
Main provisions of the Water Convention (1)

General obligations for Parties:

Parties shall implement all appropriate measures to **prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact**:

- Waste water treatment, licensing of discharges and monitoring of authorized discharges
- Best environmental practice for non-point pollution sources
- Minimization of the risk of accidental pollution
- Protection of groundwaters
- Application of Environmental Impact Assessment
- Monitoring and assessment of water resources
Main provisions of the Water Convention (2)

Specific provisions for riparian countries:
• Conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements and creation of joint bodies
• Consultation between Riparian Parties
• Joint monitoring and assessment
• Common research and development
• Exchange of information between Riparian Parties
• Warning and alarm systems
• Mutual assistance
• Public information
Water Convention: different types of support and assistance

* Soft-law tools: **Guidelines** and model provisions
* **Support to implementation**
* Provides for a **dialogue and exchange of experience** at different levels
* **Projects on the ground** (technical and political levels)

Documents, material from meetings and publications available at: [http://www.unece.org/env/water](http://www.unece.org/env/water)
UNECE Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA
= Key tools for sustainable infrastructure

**Underlying principles**

- EIA: applied to projects
- SEA: applied to plans, policies/legislation, programmes
- Helps to avoid/reduce & monitor negative environmental & health impacts of planned strategies and projects
- Improve planning & project design
- Decision-making better-informed & more objective through stakeholder consultations
- Enhance governance – transparency, public participation
- Improve cross-boarder cooperation, help avoid tensions/conflicts
- Guidelines, legislative advice, pilots and training help countries in reforming legislation and assessing the impacts of plans and projects – important tools
Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) underpins the importance of involvement of all actors to achieve sustainable development.

**Underlying principles**

- **Aarhus philosophy**
  - Sustainability needs involvement of all actors
  - People should be entitled to have a say in issues affecting their life
  - Appropriate recognition and support of organizations and groups promoting environmental protection
  - Party’s obligations to encourage developers, investors and operators to engage with the public as early as possible and provide the sufficient information on activities and products (e.g. through voluntary eco-labelling or eco-auditing schemes)
  - Effective and informed participation = Improved decision-making and implementation

- **Key features:**
  - Non-discriminatory
  - Duty to our children
  - ‘Rights-based’ approach
  - A ‘floor’ not a ‘ceiling’
Aarhus model for effective public participation in decision-making

1. Early, adequate and effective notice
2. Early public participation, when all options are open, and reasonable time frames
3. Access to all relevant information
4. Opportunity to comment and/or be heard
5. Due account to be taken of public participation
6. Prompt notice of decision
7. If operating conditions are reconsidered or updated, the above steps should be repeated, as appropriate

To learn more, follow Task Force on Public Participation and use the Maastricht Recommendations and Good practice online database