



COMMONWEALTH

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98/4/1

30 April, 1998

Fifth Meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE), 28 April 1998, UN, New York

Summary Statement of the Chairman

Commonwealth Environment Ministers met on 28 April in New York for the fifth meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE). The CCGE is the Commonwealth's primary intergovernmental forum for action on environmental issues. The meeting was convened in conjunction with the high-level segment of the 1998 session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The meeting, which was chaired by the Hon Molwyn Joseph, Antigua and Barbuda's Minister for Planning, Implementation and Environment, focused on the sustainable management and use of freshwater resources as a special theme.

Ministers agreed that there remained a substantial unfinished agenda to be addressed by the intergovernmental process on freshwater to be launched by the CSD. They considered that effective measures were needed at national and international levels to promote the sustainable use of freshwater, and proposed an agenda for further action comprising the following elements:

- adopt policies for water management which are based on an integrated, balanced, participatory approach, recognising water as both a social and economic good, vital for meeting basic human needs, food security, poverty alleviation and the protection of vital ecosystems. Policies should also be based on catchment areas as the unit of management, aim to increase access to drinking water and sanitation, and to improve pollution prevention and control;

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* Commonwealth membership currently suspended

- strengthen institutional arrangements and enhance capacities for water demand management, as well as develop effective legislative frameworks and mechanisms to improve regulation and enforcement; Increase official development assistance, concessional lending, and technology transfer for the water sector, complemented by greater efforts to mobilise additional domestic resources, especially investment from the private sector. Explore more vigorously the potential for forming public/private partnerships to increase investment in water infrastructure and services;
- adopt water pricing policies, adapted to different national economic and social circumstances, which aim to the extent possible to take account of the full costs (economic, environmental and social) of water management and use, and make greater use of well designed market-based economic instruments based on the polluter pays and user pays principles. Moreover, any water subsidies should reflect social needs and ability to pay, ensuring that the basic needs of the poor are met;
- promote consensus on the development of a shared vision for greater co-operation in the management of international and transboundary watercourses, including groundwater, in order to maximise mutual benefits for riparian states; and
- mobilise greater support for the efforts of small states, who face serious vulnerabilities and constraints in relation to freshwater, to develop integrated, sustainable and long-term water management strategies, as recommended by the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action.

Ministers agreed that the Commonwealth's wide range of experience and expertise in different facets of water resources management should be harnessed to strengthen co-operation, building upon existing programmes and projects. They suggested the following areas in particular:

- exchange of experience, information and expertise, as well as demonstration projects, in key areas (e.g. best practices in implementing measures to increase water-use efficiency in major sectors and to prevent and control pollution);
- technical assistance and training to develop skills and institutional capacities for water demand management, with particular attention given to the special needs of small states;
- the creation of a Commonwealth-wide water information network linking water experts and institutions; and