

# EFFICIENT FOOTPRINTS

SUMMARY

WATER CAUCUS, MARSEILLE, FRANCE, 14 OCTOBER 2009



## Keynote and Panel:

- Tony Allan, SOAS University of London
- Matthew Wenban-Smith, Alliance for Water Stewardship
- Safwat Abdel-Dayem, Arab Water Council
- Ramon Llamas, Fundacion Marcelino Botin
- Joppe Cramwinkel, Royal Dutch Shell
- Arjen Hoekstra, Water Footprint Network and University of Twente

A water "footprint" defines the water needed for the production of any product or service from start to finish and builds on the concept of "virtual water." It is time for an evolution in our understanding of how water footprints can be used to catalyse water stewardship through increasing water efficiencies at different scales - from the supply chains of companies, and choices on food self-sufficiency of states all the way to field level optimisation.

During the World Water Council's Water Caucus, renowned experts from around the world gathered for a lively debate. The aim was not to reach a consensus but to identify different perspectives and to get an understanding of the various conflicting arguments underpinning different points of views. Various questions were touched upon, ranging from how the concept of footprints and water stewardship can ensure greater efficiency, to what roles businesses, governments and civil society play in ensuring that minimal water footprints are achieved. should include decision-making on risk acceptance and option selection precautions, including on de-investments and allowance for continuous adjustment to changing conditions.

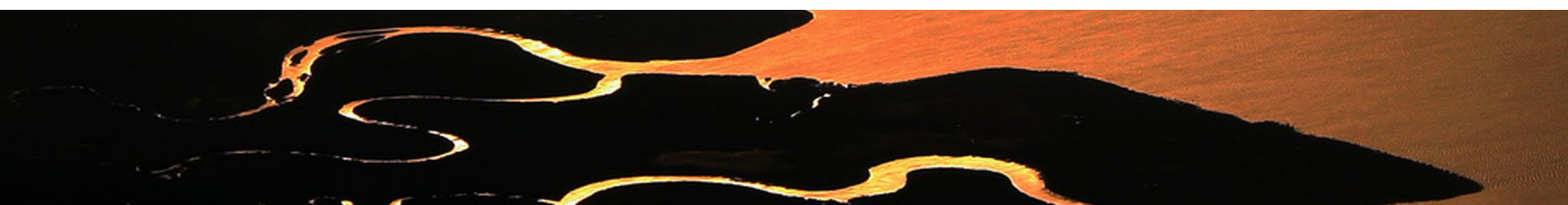


Bertrand Charrier, Session Rapporteur



After a brief introduction by Jerry Delli Priscoli, World Water Council Bureau member, Professor Allan pointed out that water footprints remain a topic of discussion essentially within advanced economies, but it is essential to consider them within international trade policies as well. He emphasized that the most promising avenue for progress remains in helping farmers to become more efficient in their production of goods. Professor Allan also encouraged thinking about individual consumption of products, the impact it has on water and the differences each of us can make by changing our habits.

After the moderator, Arjen Hoekstra from the Water Footprint Network, opened the floor to the audience, Jack Moss from Aquafed commented on the policy potential that the concept of water footprints has. If the focus is to change consumer habits, then the question about how to connect consumers and farmers becomes even more important. Although the agro-food industry is beginning to look at water footprints as a concept, the question remains on how to transfer the consumer perception to farmers and to map out responsibilities. The discussion in the room gave way to various views on consumer power influence versus government and business power.





Cooperation is very much needed between sectors, Joppe Cramwinckel of Shell reminded the assembly, especially since water and energy footprints are intricately linked. He emphasized the need to widen the context while deepening and clarifying the debate around the water intensiveness of biofuels. Shell as a corporation has the potential to further research in non-freshwater sources and innovative re-use of water. However, as a business, it needs to strengthen its collaboration with other sectors to address sustainability, equity and security issues.

Safwat Abdel-Dayem, Secretary General of the Arab Water Council, supported the observation that the strategic choice of grain crops has a huge impact on the amount of water ultimately needed. Wise trade of water-intensive products from water-rich to water-poor regions can enhance global water use efficiency and reduce pressure on water-scarce areas, but it may also reduce food security in those areas if international politics interferes. Dr. Abdel-Dayem commented that finding the right balance, in addition to considering quality issues, is a difficult task.

Ramon Llamas of the Fundacion Marcelino Botin commented on how the issue of water has entered the policy domain and what could be improved. He explained that Spain has a large water footprint, but it imports more virtual water than it exports. Despite being the driest country in Europe, the major problem they face, however, is not the lack of water, but mismanagement. Typically, 85% to 95 % of freshwater consumption is attributed to agricultural use in Spain, while only 10% of the blue water in irrigated agriculture produces 80% to 90% of the agriculture economics. This means that nearly all of the freshwater used in agriculture produces low value crops, which could instead be imported from water-rich countries. This is why a change in the allocation of Spanish blue water might solve current water conflicts. Professor Llamas suggested that a situation similar to that of Spain may exist in most arid and semi-arid regions of the industrialized and emergent economies, specifically in the MENA region.

To commence the second part of the discussion, Matthew Wenban-Smith of the Alliance for Water Stewardship presented the concept of water stewardship or “responsible use of freshwater that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable” as a response to increased impacts and risks. Mr. Wenban-Smith underlined that in many places, water use is not sustainable and needs to be managed better. Stewardship can contribute to this objective by utilising a “rewards” approach, building on an understanding of water footprints, on the one hand, and watershed level impacts, on the other.

The audience further raised questions on the role of footprinting approaches in allocation, quality, pricing, politics and best management standards. Although it would be beneficial to have single international standards with targets for each region, it was felt that creating “product labels” would not help the situation.



## NEXT STEPS

Water footprints and, more widely, the relationship between water, food and energy was further examined during a roundtable discussion of the World Water Council's General Assembly on the following Friday. It was pointed out that developing a greater understanding of useful metrics and gaining agreement on what should be measured, where, how and by whom is very important. This could help at a global level in establishing greater common ground on water footprinting data.

Given the complex institutional environment, a significant challenge is how to simplify issues—and communicate them effectively—so that they are comprehensible and manageable for policy makers and resource users. It was recommended that the Council establish a core group to take this forward, but also to work at lower levels on synthesizing and communicating data and analysis on water, food and energy systems.

