Economic Commission for Europe

Declaration of Policy on Prevention and Control of Water Pollution, including Transboundary Pollution (Decision B (XXV)) - Geneva, 1980

The Economic Commission for Europe,

Mindful of the special importance of solving the problems of the protection of water against pollution and its rational utilization in ECE member countries as an integral part of the environmental protection policy in the interests of present and future generations,

Appreciating the important role of the ECE Declaration of policy on water pollution control of 29 April 1966, which has contributed to the substantial progress made in this field by ECE member countries, the Committee on Water Problems and its subsidiary bodies,

Taking note of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Mar del Plata Action Plan adopted by the United Nations Water Conference, in particular resolutions VII and VIII and the recommendations applying more specifically to Europe,

Bearing in mind the recent international conventions aimed at the protection of the marine environment; the Convention for the prevention of marine pollution by dumping from ships and aircraft (Oslo, 1972); the Convention on the protection of the marine environment of the Baltic Sea area (Helsinki, 1974); the Convention for the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources (Paris, 1974); the Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution (Barcelona, 1976); the Convention on civil liability for oil pollution damage resulting from exploration and exploitation of sea-bed mineral resources (London, 1976); and the international conventions applicable to marine pollution due to vessel sources,

Considering that the efforts of individual countries in solving the problems of the protection of water against pollution, including transboundary pollution, should be supplemented and supported, as appropriate, by bilateral and multilateral international co-operation,

Aware of the responsibilities and activities of different United Nations bodies and other relevant international organizations in this field,

Recognizing the need for further development and strengthening of international co-operation and improvement in the co-ordination of efforts by ECE member countries in water pollution control matters, including transboundary pollution, in the light of the experience acquired during the past few years in the management and integrated use of water resources,

1. Decides to adopt the Principles on prevention and control of water pollution, including transboundary pollution set forth in the appendix to this Decision, which complete and develop the Principles contained in the 1966 Declaration;

2. Recommends to ECE Governments that they consider the possibility of applying these Principles in formulating and carrying out their water policies and in their international co-operation;

3. Invites the member Governments to report in depth to the Commission at three year intervals, through the Committee on Water Problems, on the action taken by them in this regard;

4. Requests the Executive Secretary to transmit this decision to the member Governments as a Declaration of policy on prevention and control of water pollution, including transboundary pollution;

5. Requests the Executive Secretary to transmit this decision to the organizations concerned with a view to extending international co-operation in this field.

Principles

1. The conservation of water resources and the prevention and control of water pollution are integral parts of a comprehensive national policy in environmental protection and call for active participation of national and local public authorities and water users as well as close international co-operation. The rational utilization of water resources, both surface and underground, as a basic element in the framework of long-term water management, should be viewed as an effective support to the policy of prevention and control of water pollution, taking into account the special features of each drainage basin.

2. Water pollution control should be handled taking account of possible interactions of pollutants on air, land and water.

3. The aim of water pollution control is to preserve, as far as possible, the natural quality of surface and ground water, to protect the environment which depends on such water, and to decrease existing levels of water pollution in order to protect public health and to allow the satisfaction of the needs of such water, under the best economic conditions and in sufficient quantity, in particular for[68]:

- providing drinking water of sufficiently good quality for human health;

- preserving the aquatic flora and fauna;

- providing water for industry;

- providing water for agriculture, in particular irrigation and animal consumption;

- recreation (sports and leisure) with due regard to sanitary and aesthetic requirements.

4. Governments should adopt a long-term policy directed towards the reduction of existing water pollution and its prevention in the future. To this end a series of interrelated measures should be developed including, so far as necessary, the improvement of water legislation and its implementation, the use of all legal and administrative measures, integrated land-use planning, and the application of suitable economic incentives to encourage, *inter alia*, the conservation of water, the optimization of water resources management, the elimination of pollutants, in particular, at source the development of low- and non-waste technology, including recycling of water, and research and development.

5. Important tools in water pollution control are standardization and monitoring of water quality in rivers and lakes or standardization and monitoring of effluents, or an appropriate combination of both; the quantitative and qualitative assessment of waste water and its treatment with due regard to the interests of water users and environmental protection. In setting criteria and standards, all types of water resources (surface, ground and sea water) and/or effluents should be covered. The criteria and standards themselves should, as far as possible, reflect public health, drinking water supply and environmental protection requirements and should also satisfy the demand for water in the industrial, agricultural, fisheries and other sectors of the economy.

6. Pollution of the aquatic environment by dangerous substances that are toxic, persistent and bioaccumulative should be prevented by using the best available technology and eliminated within a reasonable period of time.

7. Governments should organize the implementation of water pollution control measures as part of their national policy of environmental protection, within the framework of their institutions and taking into account the nature of the problems to be solved. In this connection, it may be desirable that States, within the limits of their constitutional and legislative competence, have at their disposal appropriate organs at the central or regional levels or at the level of the various hydrographic basins. It may be desirable that the central responsibility for water pollution control be vested in one authority or co-ordinating body on a sufficiently high level. This authority or body should carry out its work in collaboration with other authorities and within the framework of water resources, water utilization and public health policies in general. Furthermore, bodies such as committees, commissions, etc., composed of representatives of the public authorities, of representatives of users and independent experts may be entrusted with the task of helping and advising the above-mentioned organs.

8. To promote water pollution control and to protect both surface and underground water, it is essential to establish laws which prohibit all discharges of liquid and solid wastes from domestic, industrial and agricultural activities to surface waters and aquifers unless they have been authorized by the competent authority in charge of water pollution control. However, regulations for discharges of limited importance and special derogations, if appropriate, could be implemented in particular cases. In deciding whether to permit these discharges, the appropriate competent authority should ensure that the effluents are treated at least by the best practicable technology possible and that they will not endanger public health or life in general and should take particular account of the following factors:

(a) the capacity of the receiving water to assimilate materials being discharged, taking into account the physical, chemical, biological, microbiological and radio-active characteristics of these materials;

(b) the evaluation of the environmental, social and economic advantages and disadvantages of possible methods of treatment and disposal.

9. Each country should take all appropriate steps to prevent pollution of the sea, namely by the direct or indirect introduction by man into the marine environment - including estuaries - of substances or energy which may endanger human health, harm living resources and the marine ecosystem, affect amenities or interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea. Governments should therefore seek: to reduce progressively land-based pollution provoked by toxic, non-degradable and bioaccumulative substances enumerated in the appropriate supplements to different international conventions; to prohibit or to set up controls by specific permits, according to the different international conventions, of the discharge of these substances from their territories into the sea; and to carry out the principles set out in the convention pertaining to the reduction and prohibition of pollution caused in coastal areas and estuaries by exploration and exploitation of the resources of the sea.

10. It is essential that legislation on water use and pollution control should be drawn up and applied in such a way that if violations occur effective sanctions can be imposed. The competent authorities should be authorized to take immediate action in case of need.

11. The general principle should be adopted that, as far as possible, the direct or indirect costs attributable to pollution should be borne by the polluter. Each State should use the most

suitable economic incentives in order to discourage pollution and encourage the reduction of polluting discharges and the development of new technologies which are less polluting. Strategies for water pollution control should include, in addition to the installation of effluent treatment plants, the adoption of preventive measures at the earliest possible stage in the production processes, especially through the incorporation of low- and non-waste technology, water recycling and the rational use of chemicals and fertilizers in agriculture and forestry, as well as the implementation of land-use policies.

12. States should establish information and educational programmes in order to influence individual behaviour in relation to water utilization and pollution and to promote the acceptance of responsibility for dealing with water problems.

13. States sharing water resources[69] should undertake, on the basis of their national policies, concerted action to improve the quality of surface and ground water, to control pollution and to guard against accidental pollution. These States should, by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements define their mutual relations on water pollution control, especially through the widest possible exchange of information and through consultations at an early stage in regard to activities likely to have significant adverse effects on water quality in the territory of the other States. In these agreements, water quality standards and/or emission standards for a particular water body should be established, where necessary. These agreements would also stipulate the obligations of the States in solving water pollution problems, including their scientific and technological aspects. Provision should be made in particular for the use of existing structures of co-operation and for seeking new ones, as appropriate, to meet fully the interests of expanding and intensifying international relations.

14. International co-operation on water problems, within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and other competent international organizations operating within the ECE region should facilitate the exchange of experience between countries and help them to find the most appropriate solutions through the exchange of available information, especially on ways of predicting and effectively avoiding adverse environmental consequences of economic activities and new technology. This co-operation should include: exchange of scientific and technical information including experience of structure, design and technology of waste water treatment plants, and on the development and introduction of low- and non-waste technology; exchange of researchers, specialists, trainees; carrying out joint studies; comparison of long-term national policies for rational water use and water protection; organization of scientific and technical meetings; and comparison of water quality criteria and standards as well as their methods of application.