

their position in society, and future directions and roles of consulting companies in a rapidly changing world.

FIDIC has recognized that radical changes are taking place not only in the engineering field but also in all other fields at the global level. The magnitude and rapidity of these changes require special attention and major changes in strategies and approaches are needed from the consulting engineering firms. Probably one of the most notable facts was the urgency expressed by FIDIC in stressing the importance of considering new approaches and alternatives that match present and future needs in the global consulting field. Business as usual is no longer a feasible long-term option. This progressive attitude of FIDIC is in sharp contrast with most of the public sectors of the world, which still continue with a 'business as usual' philosophy and which yet do not see the importance and relevance of new alternatives in different fields.

Thousands of meetings and conferences are held every year all over the world. However, the vast majority of these meetings are best forgotten once they are over. Other international associations should consider the FIDIC Conference in the Hague as a model, in terms of its futuristic orientation, sharp focus and excellent organization of both its technical sessions and social events. In fact the FIDIC-type gatherings are likely to make a difference in delivering the message well beyond the conference halls, and in achieving their objectives.

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Xth World Water Congress, International Water Resources Association, Melbourne, 13–16 March 2000

The Xth World Water Congress of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA) was held at the Melbourne Convention Centre, Australia, 12–17 March 2000. The Congress was the first to be held in Australia and only the second in the southern hemisphere. A total of 518 registered delegates participated in the Congress, drawn from 47 countries. The central theme of the Xth Congress was: *Sharing the Waters of the Earth* and the message of *Sharing and Caring for Water* was reflected in the sessions and topics during the meeting. The theme served as a powerful reminder that balancing competing claims to water and ensuring the quality of the resource are global concerns. In many ways the Congress served as a timely opportunity to find new ways of exploring and resolving the complex water issues facing the planet. In achieving this, the Congress provided an ideal setting for researchers, professionals and community groups to come together, to share their knowledge and expertise, and to work towards solutions.

The Congress Opening Ceremony was addressed by the President of the International Water Resources Association, Professor Benedito Braga, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Conservation in the State of Victoria, Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, the Premier of the State of South Australia, Hon. John Olsen, and Brian Bayley, Managing Director of Melbourne Water, Patron Sponsor of the Congress. The keynote speaker was Graham Harris, Chief of Land and Water, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

In opening the Congress, Professor Braga summarized the disturbing situation

facing the world of water in coming decades. An increasing, urbanized population means that billions of people will have no access to water or to reasonable sanitation. To cope with that sort of future, new forms of water management are urgently needed with new paradigms and political will. The challenge facing the IWRA is to demonstrate that it has the skills and the commitment to address the world's water related problems in an interdisciplinary way and forge partnerships with governments, water professionals and managers, and stakeholder communities in pursuing solutions.

Perhaps reflecting this approach, the politicians who addressed the Opening Ceremony stressed the importance of collaboration between the Australian State and Federal Governments in tackling the issues of water quality and quantity affecting Australia's Murray-Darling Basin. Without effective salinity management, for example, the water supply for the city of Adelaide at the lower end of the Basin will not meet WHO guidelines within 20 years. At the same time, opportunities for 'living with salinity' need to be considered, with the use of saline water for crop production in parts of the region.

In his keynote address, Harris presented a graphic description of the range of water quality and quantity issues facing Australia. He emphasized that 'business as usual' was no longer an option and more than market instruments and economics were required—paraphrasing Oscar Wilde "... an economist knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing". Echoing the remarks of earlier speakers, he stated that to put a degraded environment back together requires new vision, new coalitions and world-class scholarship.

Plenary sessions opened each day of the Congress and featured noted speakers from Australia and overseas. Professor Asit Biswas, World Water Commission, observed that despite the immensity of world water problems, they hardly rated a mention at the 1992 Rio Conference. By contrast, the annual Stockholm Water Symposium had firmly established itself as the global centrepiece for discussion on water. In addition, the World Commission on Water has prompted a collective perspective on the future of the world's water. Despite these advances, Professor Biswas regretted the inadequacy of statistical data on the global water picture which could distort the seriousness of the situation, particularly in regard to urbanized concentrations of population in developing countries, and in regions in the transition.

On a more optimistic note, Stephan Lintner, keynote speaker from the World Bank, used the example of the rehabilitation of the Baltic Sea as an example of how water can be used as a catalyst for regional cooperation. As leader of the Bank's "Blue Team", he explained how a project with transboundary implications is initiated by focusing the participants, not on the problems of water sharing, but on sharing the benefits that can be realized for all parties.

As should be the case for a World Water Congress, the majority of delegates were from countries outside Australia. In many ways, this was a tribute to participants who came to Melbourne rather than to the World Water Forum which followed immediately afterwards in The Hague. Of even greater significance was the number of leading figures in the world of water who joined in the Congress and then had to leave for the Forum. The plenary and technical sessions were enriched by contributions from researchers, planners, economists, physical scientists, environmental groups, and politicians, covering a full spectrum of land and water management issues. More than 200 papers were presented and 30 poster presentations. A feature of the programme were the Focus Sessions organized to

address special issues ranging from privatization, the Internet, wetlands and groundwater, to country-specific sessions and conflict on international rivers.

The Congress heard of major projects in India including a vision of a gigantic network of waterways allowing interbasin transfers throughout the subcontinent; the huge South East Anatolia (GAP) Project in Turkey, about twice the size of Australia's Snowy Mountains Scheme, to harness the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers upstream from Syria and Iraq; and the challenge of managing the Mekong River Basin in which six countries are involved, each with a different language, culture and political system.

The problems of developing countries figured prominently on the Congress agenda. However, caution was expressed about trying to apply the water management systems operated by developing countries to those in developing regions. As Congress Chair, John Pigram noted, economic instruments such as water pricing, sophisticated water allocation systems, and private sector involvement which are features of water reform in Australia, cannot be applied directly to developed countries with different political, historical, legal, religious and socioeconomic circumstances. "South-South" transfer of water technology and experience is to be preferred to "North-South" transfer.

Australia's experience in water reform was also the focus of a lively workshop at the Congress involving leading figures from the water sector. Australia is regarded as something of a pacesetter in water reform but speakers in the workshop indicated that sharp differences existed between the States regarding the pace and direction of reform. Advancing the reform process may require a measure of financial persuasion from the Australian Federal Government which has responsibility for funding the process.

The Congress ended with closing addresses from IWRA President, Ben Braga, Past President, Glenn Stout, and President-Elect, John Pigram, and the release of the *Melbourne Declaration*, focusing on the challenge of sharing and caring for the world's water.

(A CD-ROM of the Congress papers is available from the Centre for Water Policy Research, University of New England, Armidale, Australia at a cost of A\$80. Email: cwpr@metz.une.edu.au)

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