



## Concept Note

### Developing a Water Ethics Charter

17 June 2013

A "Water Ethics Charter" is being developed by a growing group of partner organizations, who will formally launch the Charter at the 2015 World Water Forum in Daegu, South Korea. The Charter will articulate a succinct set of ethical principles to guide water use and management. Businesses, cities, and other organizations who endorse the Water Ethics Charter would commit to uphold those principles. The aim is to shift the discourse of water policy beyond a focus on meeting minimum standards to a shared ethic of actively promoting environmental restoration and human wellbeing.

#### **Why a Water Ethics Charter?**

Our premise is that conventional approaches to setting water policies and practices are leading us along an unsustainable path, in spite of the best intentions. Decision-making based on economic advantage, legal requirements, or political expediency are not serving our long-term best interest. In order to break out of the cycle of short-term interests taking precedence over long-term water sustainability, ethical principles need to be explicitly incorporated into the decision-making process. The Water Ethics Charter will offer a succinct set of principles developed by a diverse set of stakeholders from business, government, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples groups and others.

#### **Who Is Involved in developing the Charter?**

The idea for a Charter grew out of the 6th World Water Forum in Marseille in March 2012, and has recently been picked up by the Water-Culture Institute (USA)<sup>1</sup> and the French Water Academy (Académie de l'eau)<sup>2</sup> who serve as the Secretariat for the current Initiative. Since our kick-off meeting in Paris in April 2013 we have been joined by other partners, including the Botin Foundation Water Observatory (Madrid), the Académie d'éthique (Paris), The Club of Rome (Zurich), and the Alliance for Water Stewardship (Global). We welcome new partners to join the initiative and expand our geographic and sectoral representation.

#### **What Issues will the Charter address?**

The Charter will articulate a common set of principles about how water and water ecosystems should be utilized and protected for the benefit of present and future generations of people, other life forms, and the planet itself. While the details will be developed by the partner organizations in time for the March 2015 World Water Forum, the following issues are among those likely to be addressed:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.waterculture.org](http://www.waterculture.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.academie-eau.org](http://www.academie-eau.org)

- rights of water ecosystems to function in a healthy state;
- rights of people to healthy water ecosystems;
- economic principles of reasonable use of water;
- rights of Indigenous and traditional cultures to customary water ecosystems;
- principles of transparency and participation in water governance.

### **What will the Charter look like?**

At this point we anticipate that the Charter will be a very short document of about two pages, supplemented by a more detailed guidance document. One deliberate unknown at this stage is whether the Charter will be a fixed statement which would be either endorsed or not endorsed, or whether the Charter would be a flexible document which could be customized by each signatory.

### **Who will sign the Charter?**

The Charter will be applicable at any scale where there is a governance body with decision-making authority. A household or even an individual could endorse the Charter, as well as an NGO, a city, a public agency, a river basin organization, a farm and business associations, corporations, an Institute, etc. For practical and strategic reasons, our main focus will be on corporations, cities, and river basin organizations, but the Charter principles could apply equally to any organization.

### **The added value of a Water Ethics Charter**

The Charter will introduce ethics into operational and policy decisions about water. Whether the Charter is fixed or flexible, the ethical principles will be explicit and transparent and will serve to raise awareness about the ethical choices inherent in water management. In particular, the Charter will force issues of rights-of-nature, inter-generational justice, and cultural rights into public view where they can be constructively discussed and debated.

### **Developing the Charter**

A Steering Committee is being organized from among the key partners. Drafting of the charter document and marketing and outreach to promote endorsements will be the responsibility of the Steering Committee with input from all partner organizations. Contingent on funding, a series of studies may be commissioned to support the drafting of the Charter and guidelines, and to guide the outreach campaign. An initial meeting of the Steering Committee is planned for early December 2013 in Paris. At least two other meetings and several virtual meetings will be held before the March 2015 Water Forum.

### **How to get involved:**

If you would like to become part of this initiative, or for more information, please contact both David Groenfeldt and Jean-Louis Oliver by email. Thank you for your interest!

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