

## **WATER POLICY GROUP AT BUDAPEST WATER SUMMIT 15-17 OCTOBER 2019**

### **Plenary Session on the topic 'Is our Institutional Architecture capable of supporting transformation'**

As a member of the expert panel for this session, Tony Slatyer was asked to respond to the question: "As you were a part of the HLPW process, how do you think we can best build on its outcomes to support the achievement of Agenda 2030 water goals and to feed into the 2021 and 2023 UN water conferences?"

Mr Slatyer responded by recognising the work of the High-Level Panel on Water in mobilizing political leadership in understanding, valuing and managing water. He noted the political difficulty in implementing important water reforms, such as re-allocating water in response to climate change and changing societal values; cost reflective water pricing; de-risking of water investments; and sharing data in situations of transboundary rivalry. He stressed the potential for multilateral processes in including the upcoming 2021 UNGA meeting and 2023 UN Water Conference to provide 'political scaffolding' to support governments to take difficult actions.

### **Side event on the topic 'The Role Science can Play to Prevent Water Crises and Shape our Sustainable Water Future':**

As a member of the expert panel for this side event, Mr Slatyer was asked to comment on how science can better influence water policy and decision making.

Mr Slatyer responded with the following messages:

What do policy makers and decision makers most need from the science community? In my experience working closely with government Ministers over decades, in water and in other fields, they most need to understand is the potential consequences of what they might do, to know what is possible and to know what could go wrong. He advised that to maximise their influence, the water science community needed to deliver on three fronts: 1, the science needed to be true to scientific method so as to be credible and trusted; 2. the science project needs to be available to decision makers in the timeframe they need it; and 3. the science needs to be well explained and communicated so its meaning is clear and understood.

Mr Slatyer also said that 'good science' does not mean waiting for perfect or better information. Indeed, in many circumstances requiring urgent decisions, it will be better to have the science based on limited information, so long as the decision makers understand the margin of error and uncertainties embodied in the science results. He said this 'fit for purpose' approach was a key feature of the World Water Data Initiative of the High Level Panel on Water, aiming to reduce the cost and complexity of water data for decision making, and now being progressed by the World Meteorological Organisation.

### **Post Summit Workshop on 'Water, Energy and Environmental cooperation in Central Asia: Water as a Catalyst of Regional Cooperation', Corvinus University, 18 October 2019.**

Mr Slatyer was asked to address the workshop on general water policy principles for managing transboundary water scarcity risk under conditions of high uncertainty, drawing on the Australian experience.

Mr Slatyer's main messages were on the need to manage water adaptively, to be ready for anything that may come as the result of changes in the climate and in social values.

He explained how water sharing in the Murray River system involved proportionate rather than volumetric shares between the two upstream riparian States and guaranteed minimum volumes of low salinity water to the downstream state with this volume able to be modified in extreme dry periods.

He also described the role of dams and groundwater in attenuating seasonal and inter-annual unpredictability, the 'climate adaptive' features of the tradeable water rights and allocation systems applicable in most catchments and of the Sustainable Diversion Limits of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and the role of political agreements such as the National Water Initiative in providing key guiding principles. He also explained the importance of water use efficiency in enabling societies to choices as to how saved water should be deployed.

Mr Slatyer emphasised that he was not saying any of these policies will be potentially appropriate in central Asia. However he thinks it is important as the climate changes that we are all open to each other's experiences in our efforts to achieve sustainable water use for the benefit of all our citizens.

Mr Slatyer travel costs were supported by the Hungarian Government and the Australian Water Partnership.