

AWRA POLICY DIALOGUES 1-4 SUMMARY

http://www.awra.org/meetings/conference_series/policy_dialogue.html

Compiled by Richard A. Engberg, AWRA Technical Director
January 2012

Introduction

The American Water Resources Association (AWRA) sponsored four policy dialogues during the first decade of the 21st Century. The concept of the first policy dialogue was conceived by AWRA Board of Directors (BOD) member Ron Yates. It was introduced to and approved during a BOD meeting held in January 2001. A committee consisting of BOD member Yates, AWRA Technical Director Richard Engberg, and Mark Dunning of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was established to begin work on the dialogue.

The original committee prepared a dialogue concept paper, recruited a General Chair, recruited sponsoring federal agencies, and formed a Steering Committee comprised of the original committee with additional members, one each from the sponsoring agencies, plus other strategic individuals.

The Steering Committee during several meetings selected six critical water issues for discussion at the dialogue, determined the format for the dialogue, and suggested keynote and panel discussion speakers. AWRA staff selected the meeting location and determined the cost of the dialogue. The dialogue originally was planned as an invitation only meeting but later was opened to all interested parties.

The overwhelming success of the first dialogue led the BOD to approve a second, third, and fourth dialogue that were held on approximately a two year frequency. Planning of the second and third dialogues was by the Steering Committee which remained largely intact after the first dialogue. Planning for the second and third dialogues followed the same pattern as that for the first dialogue. The fourth dialogue was planned by an ad hoc committee. The fourth dialogue was much smaller in sponsorship, scope and duration than were the first three dialogues. All were convened by AWRA.

The dialogue dates and locations were:

First Dialogue	September 17-18, 2002	Washington, DC
Second Dialogue	February 14-15, 2005	Tucson, AZ
Third Dialogue	January 22-23, 2007	Arlington, VA
Fourth Dialogue	September 22, 2008	Washington, DC

Visit the Dialogues homepage:

http://www.awra.org/meetings/conference_series/policy_dialogue.html

First National Water Resources Policy Dialogue

Purpose: To provide a forum for participants from all levels of government as well as public and private organization to discuss critical water resources challenges facing the nation and the policy choices that need to be made to effectively deal with these challenges.

Financial Sponsors: FEMA; National Ocean Service; National Weather Service; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Bureau of Reclamation; National Resources Conservation; Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U. S. Geological Survey; U. S. Forest Service

Dialogue Chair: Gerald E. Galloway, Jr.

Dialogue Facilitator: Jerry Delli Priscoli

Steering Committee: Richard A. Engberg, Chair; one representative from each of the 10 financial sponsors; Jerry Delli Priscoli; Susan Gilson; Gerald E. Galloway, Jr.

Attendance: 267 persons from government agencies at all levels of government, consultants, NGOs, industry and academia.

Critical Water Issues: (Determined by the Steering Committee)

Restoring and Protecting the Environment
Safety and Security of Water Resources
Water Resources Infrastructure
Managing Watersheds Holistically
Sustainable Water Use and Drought Management
Flood Plain and Coastal Zone Management

Dialogue Format:

Keynotes: Three keynote addresses focused on the critical issues from State, Congressional, and Administration perspectives (Hon. Parris Glendening, Hon. Harry Reid, and Hon. James Connaughton respectively)

Panels: Six panels comprised of water resources leaders; each panel focused on one of the critical water issues listed above; followed by facilitated discussions.

Facilitated Small Group Discussions: Three small group discussion sessions focused on identifying key actions. Small groups reported back to the entire group.

Final Session: A concluding feedback session that incorporated views from three provocateurs, from selected panelists, and from an open discussion with participants.

Main Conclusions: Main conclusions were developed as a result of small group discussions with all attendees offered the opportunity to express their views. Ideas were posted on the walls of the meeting room and participants were used a dot voting procedure to prioritize the ideas and recommendations. The following themes were prevalent:

Balance and sustainability: participants called for balancing environmental needs and economic requirements with a focus on sustainability

Holism and watersheds: participants generally concluded decisions about water resources are most appropriate at the watershed level

Alignment and integration: participants felt too many conflicting goals and mandates are pursued at the Federal level – pursued in isolation creating conflict and gridlock; need greater synergy among Federal programs.

Collaboration and Cooperation: participants wish to see greater cooperation among all levels of government to achieve sustainable solutions to critical issues.

Information and Education: participants stressed the need to inform and educate the public about the need for action on water resources issues.

Congress and the Administration were called upon to provide the leadership necessary for achieving the direction suggested by the above themes. The following actions were recommended:

Develop a national water vision – all levels of government.

Formulate policy principles for translating the vision into action – shared responsibilities at all levels of government and the private sector.

Cooperation and collaboration – insist this take place among all levels of government

Where do we go from here: Several avenues for continued work were discussed and generally agreed on:

Coalition building: Grass roots support for vision

Agenda building: Build an agenda for responding to key areas of agreement

Continue the dialogue: Hold additional dialogues

Public education: Inform and educate the public about water challenges, solutions, strategies, etc.

Communication of Results: Letters were sent to the President, key administration and legislative officials and the nation's Governors summarizing the results of the Dialogue.

Second National Water Resources Policy Dialogue

Purpose: See First Dialogue

Financial Sponsors: Same as First Dialogue.

Co-sponsors: Forty non-financial co-sponsors representing state and local agencies, professional associations and the private sector.

Dialogue Chair: Gerald E. Galloway, Jr.

Dialogue Facilitator: Jerry Delli Priscoli

Steering Committee: Same as First Dialogue

Attendees: 250 persons from government agencies at all levels, academia, industry, consultants, NGOs and the public.

Critical Water Issues: These were derived from results of the First Dialogue and were refined by Steering Committee discussions. While the conference was national in scope, it had a greater emphasis on western water issues.

Water Resources Supply and Demand
Infrastructure Management
Environmental Quality

Dialogue Format:

Keynote and Luncheon Speakers: Their focus was primarily on western water issues. Speakers included Hon. Janet Napolitano, Governor of Arizona; Hon. Pete Domenici, U.S. Senator, New Mexico; Hon. Bennett Raley, Denver, CO; Dr. Robert Glennon, University of Arizona; Hon. Tom O'Halleran, Arizona House of Representatives; Hon. Cesar Herrera Toledo, Director General, National Water Commission, Mexico.

Panels: Three panels were comprised of water resources leaders. Each panel focused on one of the three critical water resources issues listed above and were followed by facilitated discussions.

Facilitated Small Group Discussions: Small group facilitated discussions on the panel topics solicited views from dialogue participants on the kind of improvements needed to address the critical water resources issues. A dot voting procedure was used to gain a sense of relative priority of the views expressed in the sessions.

Final Session: The concluding session incorporated feedback from three provocateurs and from an open discussion with attendees.

Main Conclusions and Dialogue Outcomes: Two principal concerns of the attendees were the nation's water policies are not in sync with contemporary needs and societal preferences and water policies are in need of reform through collaboration at all levels of government and the private sector. Dialogue outcomes

represented four key water resources challenges and two crosscutting issues. These represent “where do we go from here.”

Challenges:

Promoting More Integrated Approaches. There is a need to address the nation’s water issues in an integrated manner dealing with watershed-level problems. Obstacles to integrated approaches include: a) the absence of clear policy promoting integrated water resources management; b) the presence of multiple, often conflicting, agency mandates and priorities; c) the lack of coordinating mechanisms and forums for dealing with differences among agencies and among stakeholders; and d) the lack of adequate scientific data to permit basic understanding of complex physical and biological issues and to facilitate good decisions.

Reconciling the Current Ad Hoc National Water Policy. There is a need to reconcile the myriad laws, executive orders, and Congressional guidance that have created the current disjointed ad hoc national water policy and to clearly define the 21st century goals and values that should be met. Many important laws were passed early in the last century when national objectives and physical conditions were far different. Many of these documents conflict with each other, placing executing federal agencies in tenuous and sometimes adversarial situations and creating disharmony among states and localities. Participants called for clarification of roles and responsibilities among federal agencies, for establishment of a clearer vision for uses and priorities for the nation’s water resources, and for the development of coordinating mechanisms to harmonize and reconcile policy differences before they lead to gridlock. A National Commission was discussed as one means of addressing this critical need.

Developing Collaborative Partnerships. The fiscal realities facing the nation underline the need to more effectively coordinate the actions of federal, state and local governments in managing water. Collaboration instead of competition will provide more effective and fiscally efficient use of scarce resources and assist in overcoming decision gridlock on key water programs. The following were suggested: a) Integrate water quality and water quantity management; b) Establish or invigorate forums to resolve differences in federal agency policy and mission focuses and to deal with multijurisdictional coordination, interstate, and cross-jurisdictional water management issues; c) Cut across boundaries – encourage federal/state/local partnerships to address water resources comprehensively and in an integrated manner; and d), How best to assign the “lead facilitator” or “lead integrator” role in collaborative frameworks.

Providing Information for Sound Decision Making: The nation’s superb scientific capability and cutting-edge information technologies needs to be focused on supporting water policy decision-makers as they carry out their challenging responsibilities. A national assessment of water availability and use was thought by many to be long overdue.

Crosscutting Issues:

Financing Water Resources Improvements: Funding for our nation’s vital water infrastructure is not keeping pace with repair, replacement, and renovation requirements. There is a need for innovative cost-recovery, pricing and financing mechanisms to address infrastructure funding needs.

Educating the Public and Public Officials about Water Resources Challenges: Much of the public at large and many public officials lack an understanding of the water resources challenges facing the nation.

Communication of Results: Letters summarizing the results of the Second Dialogue were sent to the President, key administration officials, House of Representatives and Senate leaders, and to the nation’s Governors. No response was received from the Administration. General Chair Galloway was invited to testify about the results before a Senate Committee chaired by Senator Pete Domenici.

Third National Water Resources Policy Dialogue

Purpose: See First Dialogue

Financial Sponsors: Twelve federal agencies and several local and regional organizations.

Co-sponsors: Twenty-six non-federal organizations represented a broad spectrum of water resources interests.

Dialogue Co-chairs: Gerald E. Galloway, Jr. and Richard A. Engberg

Facilitators: Jerry Delli Priscoli and David Watt

Steering Committee: Co-chairs, Richard A. Engberg and Gerald E. Galloway, representatives from 12 federal agencies, Jerry Delli Priscoli, Peter Evans, Brenda Bateman

Attendance: 150 persons representing federal/state/local government agencies, tribes, NGOs, industry, academia and the private sector

Critical Water Issues: Discussions were centered on three priority needs for better policy identified in the two previous dialogues:

Reconciling contradictory water policies
Improving collaboration
Broadening the role of science in policy decisions

Dialogue Format:

Keynote and Luncheon Speakers: Hon. John Linder, U.S. Congressman, Georgia; Hon. Earl Blumenauer, U.S. Congressman, Oregon; Hon. Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture; Hon. John Paul Woodley, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works; David Maurstad, FEMA Mitigation Division

Thought Leaders: This was a concept used for the first time in the Dialogue series and replaced the panels on the priority water issues. Several prominent water resources leaders spoke on some aspect of the critical water issues. Thought leaders were: Steven McCormick, Nature Conservancy; Kathleen McGinty, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; George Kuper, Council of Great Lakes Industries; Jeffrey Kightlinger, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; Robert Perciasepe, National Audubon Society; Donald Boesch, University of Maryland; Erik Webb, Office of Senator Pete Domenici

Panels: Panels on Federal agency perspectives on water policy were held at the beginning of each day. Most federal agencies that were sponsors of the Dialogue were represented on the panels.

Facilitated Small Group Sessions: Facilitated small group sessions were held on each of the three critical water issues. Participants identified improvements necessary to address the issues. A dot voting procedure was used to prioritize the solutions developed.

Final Session: The final session included presentations by three provocateurs, Dan Beard, Tracy Mehan, and Terry Williams and a facilitated open discussion among the attendees.

Dialogue Outcomes - Critical Theme One-Reconciling Contradictory Water Policies

Developing a Clear Water Vision – A vision should be national not federal. States must play an active role in helping a clear vision to emerge. All levels of government need to actively dialogue and come to agreement about broad principles of water management. Watershed boundaries need to be emphasized and political boundaries deemphasized.

Substantive Coordination – Silo-ing misses opportunities for greater synergies among programs, pursues conflicting goals, or works at cross purposes. There is a need for a modern federal coordinating body for federal water resources responsibilities.

Water Needs Assessment - A new National Water Assessment is needed. The last one was in 1973. Participants felt a new water commission should be created to develop comprehensive information about contemporary water resources needs (the assessment) and would also develop policies that reflect federal-to-local shifts in responsibilities.

Dialogue Outcomes – Critical Theme Two-Improving Collaboration

Dialogue participants believed organizing our goals, policies and rules around the concept of places (basins or watersheds) is a common-sense way of promoting collaboration among all levels of government. Their recommendation is to provide basin-level or watershed-level organizations with authority to plan, conserve and protect local waters. Sharing data at watershed scales, structuring credit-trading programs, and funding demonstration projects were all suggested as ways that could promote greater collaboration. Participants recognized impediments to watershed-oriented collaboration such as a provision in the 1986 WRDA act that makes it difficult to evaluate water resources needs in a watershed context. This should be changed in a future WRDA act. One speaker quoted Henry Ford: “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

Dialogue Outcomes – Critical Theme Three- Broadening the Role of Science

Sound water policy depends on good science. Ensuring adequate funding to maintain the water data collection network is of the highest priority. Good science involves better communication of issues and risks in easy to understand ways. As one speaker put it, “Societal choices are based on values. Science can help illuminate the choices...” Participants believe good science should embrace the concept of adaptive management, management that evolves as more information and better technology becomes available. This is a rational response to uncertainty and the limits of knowledge. Finally, water resources professionals must do a better job of explaining, in both a qualitative as well as a quantitative manner, the factors relevant to decisions.

Key Actions: Broad areas of agreement emerged about actions needed to improve/shape water policy. Who needs to do what was identified:

Administration, Congress, Governors, and Tribal Leaders: work together to establish principles for water management.

Administration: form an interagency coordinating body; make federal agency operations and programs more watershed oriented; incorporate risk-based evaluation procedures and communicate risk to the public.

Administration and Congress: change policies that place constraints on watershed planning.

Congress: authorize and appropriate funds for a national assessment of current and emerging water resources needs; create a joint committee on water.

States: empower the roles of basin councils in watershed management.

Private Sector: explore, innovate and push for ways to bring market-based approaches to bear on water resources decisions.

Water Resource Professionals: communicate more effectively with decision makers and the public.

Communication of Results: The results of the Third Dialogue were furnished in letters to the President, key Administration and Legislative officials, and the Governors of all states. Written favorable responses were received from ten governors or their surrogates. No response was received from the Administration.

The Dialogue co-chairs delivered letters personally to several key House and Senate staffers and met with representatives of OSTP, CEQ, and OMB.

Fourth National Water Resources Policy Dialogue

Purpose: The Fourth Policy Dialogue was radically different than the first three. It lasted only 6 hours. It had no keynote speakers, panelists, or provocateurs. The 59 attendees were invited water resources experts representing congressional staffs, federal agencies and various government and nongovernmental organizations from around the country. It was held in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. Its purpose was to discuss and recommend actions that should be taken by the new Administration and Congress once they take office in January 2008. It was built on the results of the first three dialogues with the premise of moving from discussion to action.

Sponsorship, Facilitation, and Committee: The Fourth Dialogue was sponsored financially by AWRA, the Environment and Water Resources Institute (EWRI) of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). The Committee consisted of Gerald E. Galloway, Jr. and Richard A. Engberg (AWRA), Kyle Schilling (EWRI), and David Conrad (NWF). Gerald E. Galloway, Jr. facilitated the Dialogue which was comprised completely of facilitated discussions.

Actions Recommended: The participants, building on results of the earlier dialogue recommended the following as actions that could be taken early in the next administration.

- There is an immediate need for an assessment of the nation's water status to include the current status of the resource, future needs for water, and identification of gaps that exist in fulfilling these needs.
- The federal government, in cooperation with state and local agencies, needs to develop overarching principles to guide water resources development activities supported by the federal government.
- There is increasing need for mechanisms that will better coordinate the water related activities of federal agencies and among congressional committees. The absence of effective coordination is apparent in the conflicts and overlaps that exist in legislation, programs and agency activities.
- The relationship among the federal government, states and local communities is changing and must be addressed. The federal government's role in water resources, long seen to be a driving force must be reevaluated in light of growing state attention and direction of water resource activities.
- Federal actions with regard to water resources must be taken in a watershed context where the underlying planning is carried on by the states and local entities.

Communication of Results: Letters containing a summary of the recommended actions were delivered to the Obama Transition Team and to key House and Senate Staffers through personal visits by Gerald E. Galloway, Jr. and Richard A. Engberg. ***Editorial Note:*** Although these recommendations were presented to and discussed by the House Water Caucus, no action has been taken on any of the recommendations as far as this writer knows.