



# Preparation of a National Water Resources Policy



## Summary

**A National Water Resource Policy (NWRP) shapes the goals and objectives for the development and management of water resources and related services. Following the IWRM approach, NWRPs are intended to cover all water-related sectors (e.g., drinking-water, irrigation, disaster risk, navigation, land use, etc.). They provide specifications on the cross-cutting institutional arrangements, management instruments, and financing mechanisms needed to ensure a coordinated management of water across these sub-sectors. This Tool outlines the main features of NWRP and highlights key guiding principles for NWRP preparation.**

## What is a National Water Resource Policy (NWRP)?

A National Water Resources Policy (NWRP) shapes the goals and objectives for the management of water resources and services at the national scale based on IWRM principles. Typically, an NWRP declares all water resources within the country as national property. The NWRP details coordinated, cross-sectoral policies for localities, regions, catchments ([Tool B3.04](#)), and transboundary or international water resources ([Tool B3.01](#)). Here, issues associated with the quantity and quality of both surface and ground water resources are addressed. Such policies often begin with a situation analysis to identify the challenges based on the specific context and objectives. In many cases, NWRP's only address water-related issues related to potable water, however there is a need to incorporate the use of water by other sectors. To compliment the policy, a national law should be enforced which outlines the legal framework for its implementation ([Tools A2](#)).

## Scope and Elements of NWRP

The scope of NWRPs vary among countries but can typically include specifications relating to the following elements:

- **Institutional mechanisms** – that encourage cross-sectoral linkages between policies, actors, sectors - both water and non-water focused.
- **Water allocation priorities** – between different sub-sector usages, e.g., drinking water · irrigation, hydropower, ecology, agro-industries and non-agricultural industries, navigation, and other uses, with due regard to the availability of water resources.
- **Water resources planning** - which considers sustainability and environmental issues in the planning, design, construction, operation, and management of major water projects.
- **Groundwater developments** – which ensure the restoration and protection of all potential groundwater resources through the monitoring and regulation of groundwater exploitation and coordinated development of both surface and groundwater resources.
- **Drinking water services** – monitored so that water service providers offer consumers adequate facilities and water which meets the appropriate existing guidelines or minimum standards.
- **Irrigation planning** – for water supply infrastructure, distribution, and development, for example, in the agricultural sector, to reduce risk, increase yield, and enhance production through means of water-use efficiency techniques and other management practices.
- **Wastewater planning** – to improve the quality of wastewater effluent through the creation of standards, adoption of principles (e.g., polluters-pays), and the maintenance and upgrading of wastewater collection, treatment, and disposals systems.
- **Disaster risk reduction** – strategies for management of flood, drought, and other water-related emergencies - including pressures brought on by climate change.
- **Participatory approaches** – to facilitate partnerships for the inclusion of all users and stakeholders in decision-making processes and determine their role in the management of water resources, including men and woman ([Tools B5](#)), children and youth ([Tool C5.01](#)), the elderly, and other vulnerable groups.
- **Private sector participation** – to encourage responsibility and ownership of water resources by both public and private sector actors, alongside adequate financial resources, innovation etc.
- **Information systems** – mandating the provision of standardised, easily accessible, accurate, and up-to-date data on water resources and needs, for decision-making purposes.
- **Research and Technology** – innovations, development, and diffusion to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of water resource management practices e.g., desalinisation, wastewater treatment.

## Guiding Principles for NWRP Preparation

When preparing an effective NWRP, the following principles should be considered:

1. Identify cross-sectoral interests and set priorities for key water resources issues to ensure a focused and accepted policy. This can be achieved through the engagement and participation of all relevant sectors and stakeholders (including local communities and governments, and the private sector) in policy dialogue ([Tools C6](#)). Additional focus should be placed on facilitating potential public-private partnerships ([Tool B3.05](#)). It is thus important to acknowledge potential conflicts and when necessary, utilise tools for conflict resolution ([Tool C6.02](#), and [Tool C6.03](#)).
2. Integrate with other national development policies, so that all water-related developments within societal and economic sectors are addressed, and that social and economic policies (e.g., energy and food-related policies) take into account their impact on water resources and vice versa ([Tool C1.10](#)).
3. Clarify the roles and jurisdiction of government and other stakeholders in the achievement of overall goals. Emphasise and clearly define the role of the government as a regulator, organiser of the participatory process, and last resort mediator in cases of conflict. Additional focus should be placed on facilitating potential public-private partnerships ([Tool B3.05](#)).
4. Broaden the range of issues addressed to include developmental alongside water focused issues. To address these issues, make explicit the links between land use/s and other socio-economic activities.
5. Recognise water a social and economic good, where it can be managed via the implementation of water allocation systems which distribute resources to where they offer the greatest value to society, starting with the fulfilment of basic needs (i.e., potable water and sanitation).
6. Identify the importance of subsidiarity, so that water resource allocation decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level ([Tool B3.03](#)).
7. Enforce monitoring and control over environmental degradation, as to minimise the pollution of and encourage the conservation of water-related ecosystems ([Tool C1.05](#)).
8. Analysis of the potential costs and benefits before its adoption. Aim for long-term sustainable changes, however trade-offs between short term costs and long-term gains should also be considered. If necessary, reforms may be required in the short-term.
9. Identify instruments which can be implemented to help achieve objectives. This can include a variety of technical, economic, administrative, legal, regulatory, and participatory instruments.
10. Acquire sufficient funding resources, including investments, mechanisms, and economic incentives to achieve financial sustainability ([Tools D](#)). It should also have a positive fiscal impact on finances of the central or local government, e.g., from a tax, a price increase, a charge, a reduction in subsidies, or the avoidance of major capital spending.
11. Outline a detailed action plan ([Tools A3](#)), including the appropriate management instruments ([Tools C](#)), institutional arrangements ([Tools B](#)), finance mechanisms ([Tools D](#)), and legal and regulatory frameworks ([Tools A2](#)). This will avoid delays and ensure that completed policies (laws, and regulations) successfully enter into force.
12. Sustainability and capacity building should be promoted as central themes ([Tools B4](#)).
13. Set up data collection systems which can offer easy accessibility of information by users.
14. Acknowledge the roles of women in the provision, management and safeguarding of water resources and services, and encourage empowerment activities to enable both men and woman to play their role ([Tools B5](#)).
15. Be considered as a continuous process, enabling space for flexibility and adaptation

based on existing and future institutional and management capacities.

## **Prepare and Advocate for Policy Change**

Policies need to be periodically reviewed to keep up with the reality of the country and reflect its broader political, socio-economic, and environmental ambitions. Water-related policy are complex processes which do not happen overnight, however, here are some key guiding principles on how to best prepare for driving transformative change in NWRPs (GWP, 2009):

- **A clear message** around which people can unite – in most cases the message needs to appeal to a broad audience, not just water professionals, and address an issue of immediate concern. In other cases, it may be directed at a specific group with the power to make change happen.
- **Strong, credible data** to support the need for change and its feasibility and benefits.
- **Smart marketing** – understanding the policy and implementation climate, including the importance of timing, who has influence, how to package your message to appeal to the interests of potential allies, and incentives for different actors to participate in change processes.
- **Persistence** – policy change is an on-going process and sustaining policy change requires continued engagement. Even when new policy is implemented, it is necessary to monitor outcomes and correct problems that arise due to poor implementation or unanticipated consequences.

## **Thematic Tagging**

Climate , Gender , Private Sector , Transboundary , Urban , Water services , Youth

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwrmaactionhub.org/learn/iwrm-tools/preparation-national-water-resources-policy>