



National Apex Bodies



Summary

National apex bodies for water are governmental entities that aim to provide intersectoral coherence through coordinating all institutions with mandated responsibilities related to water. Apex bodies may take various forms but their coordinating and intersectoral ambition remains the same. This Tool provides an overview of the various forms, functions, and considerations related to existing and potential apex bodies.

Rationale for National Apex Bodies

The multi-dimensional nature of water challenges in any country creates the incentive to activate intersectoral mechanisms, known as national apex bodies (GWP and WWWS, 2015). The name indicates the idea behind the concept, which is to put water issues at the highest level of policy making (Newborne, 2005).

These entities enhance coordination between sectors, government agencies, civil society, and the private sector (PREP, 2007) outlining IWRM principles. However, it is important to recognise that establishing an apex body alone will not provide the guarantee of IWRM approach and it should be combined with respective policies, legislation, and capacity building mechanisms in place (GWP, 2004). Apex bodies provide a forum for different government departments and other stakeholders to work together on intersectoral objectives to avoid the situation when different ministries operating within the water sector (irrigation, energy, environment, water supply, health, fisheries, navigation, economic affairs etc.) focus solely on their plans and priorities (Birch, 2004).

Forms and Functions of Apex Bodies

National apex bodies for water may also be known as water councils, commissions, boards, and authorities. These may vary structurally from country to country with apex bodies being more pronounced in low-income countries due to aid agencies' influence ([Araral and Yu, 2013](#)). In Asia (Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh), apex bodies usually consist of several institutions, including an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister or deputy Prime Minister, an inter-ministerial executive committee, and a secretariat, which lies within a water resources entity ([Newborne, 2005](#)). In Kazakhstan, an Interagency Council on Water Resources Management serves as an advisory single body under the government established with the order of the Prime Minister. In Mexico, the National Water Commission operates under the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources ([GWP, 2004](#)). In some cases, a single ministry may be responsible for the majority of water-related services providing a platform for intersectoral cooperation. In Kenya, Ministry of Water, Sanitation, and Irrigation is held accountable for water supply services, sewer and non-sewer sanitation services, water harvesting and storage, water resource management, water sector investment planning, transboundary waters, irrigation water management, irrigation and drainage, irrigation water storage, and land reclamation.

The functions of national water apex bodies vary across countries but typically involve the following:

- Formulation of water policies and laws in line with building institutional capacity;
- Coordination of water resources management and water services reforms;
- Facilitation of dialogue between ministries or parts of one ministry, non-governmental, and external actors (civil society, communities, and donors).

Some country-specific functions include:

- Regulation of water rates to be charged by utilities (e.g., the Philippines' National Water Resources Board);
- Definition of environmental protection standards (e.g., the Kazakh Interagency Council on Water Resources Management) ([UNECE, 2019](#));
- Finding solution for flood and erosion (e.g., the Indian North East Water Management Authority) ([Standing Committee on Water Resources, 2021](#));
- Assessment of national strategy on climate change (e.g., the Moroccan High Council for Water and Climate) (OECD, 2021);
- Declaration of a water-related emergency (e.g., the intersectoral Steering Committee of Antigua and Barbuda) ([GWP and WWWS, 2015](#));
- Realisation of integrated land use planning (e.g., Samoa IWRM Apex Body) ([PREP, 2007](#));
- Raising public awareness on water rights (e.g., the Nepalese Water and Energy Commission Secretariat) and water crisis (e.g., the National Water Resources Authority of Yemen).

Key Considerations for Establishing National Apex Bodies

A number of key elements and preconditions are needed for national apex body to take an effective leadership role as coordinating entity for water management:

- Its responsibilities should be clearly defined, enshrined in legal and policy documents (Tools A1; Tools A2) and it should gain support from high level government in sponsorship (Birch, 2004).
- The establishment of a national apex body requires time to achieve legitimacy as it is also linked to certain political and historical circumstances as well as a legacy of competition amongst other ministries and governmental bodies (GWP, 2004).
- In cases when apex bodies are not represented by one ministry, it is advised that they should not report to government via one of the sectoral line ministries to secure the neutral status of the body. This will also avoid overlap and duplication of operational functions in regard to water resources management and water service delivery (Birch, 2004).
- In terms of broader institutional framework, the roles that make up water management should be separated: standard setter (apex policy body), water resources manager, and water operator (Molle, 2005).

Thematic Tagging

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

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