



THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF AUSTRALIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

7 March 2022

Mr Liu Zhenmin
Under-Secretary-General
Secretary-General of the UN 2023 Water Conference
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
Room S-2922 UN Secretariat Building
New York 10017

Dear Mr Liu

I am writing to respond to the letter from Under-Secretary General Mr Liu Zhenmin (DESA-22/00098) of 21 January 2022 inviting the Australian Government to submit proposals on possible themes for the five interactive dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Conference agenda.

We propose that the themes of the interactive dialogues align with the broader social benefits of improved water resource management and access to water and sanitation. Australia considers that this approach would add to the overall impact of the Conference and help to increase national-level awareness, understanding, and action towards the water-related goals in the 2030 Agenda.

Australia's proposal and rationale are set out in the following attachment. We would be pleased to answer any questions you have on our proposal, and to participate in any future discussions and briefings on the conference for UN Member States.

I consent to this letter being posted to the Conference website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Fifield', written over the typed name.

Mitch Fifield

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UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

Opportunity and objectives

The 2023 Water Conference's interactive dialogues provide an opportunity to pioneer a new way of working on water and sanitation challenges: directly and deeply engaging government ministers and agencies, and non-government stakeholders, with primary responsibility for the broad social outcomes that rely on the sustainable management of water resources and improved water and sanitation services. Interactive dialogues are ideally suited for this purpose and would position water as a cross-cutting issue at the centre of resolving the world's major issues. The global water and sanitation community would be engaging with the world and saying 'it's not about us, it's about you'.

Achieving this requires changing the usual practice of water conferences focusing on water issues in and of themselves – something that is often characterised as being 'in a water box'. The interactive dialogues can and should be dialogues between the people who have responsibility for the management of water resources and provision of water and sanitation services, and the people responsible for outcomes that depend on the successful management of water resources and the provision water and sanitation services.

These 'other outcomes' can be as broad as improved peace and security, social cohesion, economic development, public health and education, food security, employment growth, mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation to climate change, disaster risk reduction, and environmental improvements.

Cross-sectoral interactive dialogues that adopt this approach would:

- provide a forum for stakeholders in these broader outcomes to work with water stakeholders in defining and promoting the 'further actions, initiatives, successes and enhanced partnerships' (as called for by OP4d), drawing on their knowledge and understanding of how water outcomes can assist them to achieve their objectives;
- discover and promote new and better ways for countries to achieve their SDG6+ commitments, particularly those not on track to achieve them under current policies;
- in line with the Global SDG 6 Acceleration Framework, provide ideas on how to overcome inherent challenges of cross-sectoral approaches in the fields of financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance, and thus leverage the multiple co-benefits that sustainable water management and access to water and sanitation can provide for development outcomes of other sectors; and
- be of real interest and benefit to Member States at a whole-of-government level, as they may be represented by a head of government or economic or development minister. In doing so, the dialogue may raise the priority of water and sanitation issues within those governments that have the most to do to achieve SDG6 targets and the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

Doing this effectively at a multilateral level can show the way to achieve cross-sectoral dialogue and support at the national and sub-national levels of government and society.

This would also accord with the objectives of the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018-28 (A/RES/71/222), to place a greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources for the achievement of broader social, economic and environmental objectives and the furtherance of cooperation and partnership at all levels.

In short, the interactive dialogues are an opportunity to 'break out of the water box' and set new ways of working across sectors to achieve sustainable development objectives.

Proposal

A range of multilateral processes are currently focused on global-scale challenges—challenges that would be directly supported by improved water outcomes. There are many possible ways of grouping these 'beneficiary outcomes'.

One way of structuring the interactive dialogues to address these beneficiary outcomes is below. In each of the five dialogue themes listed, all of the relevant SDG targets – not just the SDG6 targets – would be identified and addressed. Each of the five Global Accelerator Framework accelerators would also be worked through, to establish how they can be best applied to contribute to the broader outcomes under discussion.

Possible interactive dialogue title	Main issues	Primary beneficiary sectors / SDGs
'Delivering on Paris'	Greenhouse gas emission reduction. Climate change adaptation Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai) Infrastructure resilience	Climate / 13 Energy / 7 Hunger / 2 Employment / 8 Cities / 11 Waste / 12
'Building back better'	COVID-19 Other public health Sustainable economic recovery	Health / 3 Education / 4 Employment / 1+8+9 Welfare / 1+5+10
'Feeding the world'	Food security Nutrition	Agriculture / 2 Food waste / 12
'Harmony with nature'	Biological Diversity Habitat protection Invasive species management	Oceans / 14 Land-based / 15
'Peaceful and inclusive societies'	Women's empowerment and equity Transboundary cooperation. Effective institutions	Gender equality / 5 Peace and justice / 16 Global partnerships / 17