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Asian Development Bank

**South Pacific Applied Geoscience
Commission**

SOPAC

Pacific Island Nations Agree on Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Water Management

***Move Comes Ahead of UN World Summit for Sustainable Development in
Johannesburg and 3^d World Water Forum in Kyoto***

SIGATOKA, Fiji Islands, August 3, 2002 -- A new action plan for sustainable water management in the small island countries of the Pacific was announced here today at the conclusion of a week-long meeting of ministers, and other senior representatives of governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies, civil society (including NGOs and community based organizations) and the private sector.

In adopting the action plan, the ministers and heads of country delegations from 18 island countries and representatives of civil society groups stressed the participatory nature of their deliberations and reinforced their commitment to sharing knowledge to address common water problems and solutions. They noted the unique geographic and physical characteristics, as well as the fragile nature of water resources in small island countries, which impact the health and well-being of their peoples, environment and economic development. They also recognized the important linkages between water resources, water services, and wastewater management, including sanitation and hygiene.

The action plan calls for collaborative approaches in six main areas:

- ?? **Water resources management**
- ?? **Island vulnerability**
- ?? **Participation, information and education (awareness)**
- ?? **Technology**
- ?? **Institution strengthening, inter-agency partnership and governance; and**
- ?? **Financing policies**

Commenting on the agreement, **Alf Simpson, Director of the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC)**, which, together with the Asian Development Bank, organized the meeting, said: "*This was the first time that government officials, NGOs and all the other people concerned with water issues from our islands have come together to hammer out a unified*

approach to the problems we face.” He added: “ We now move forward to the Johannesburg Summit and next March’s 3rd World Water Forum in Japan with a strong message and a real opportunity to demonstrate to the international community our commitment to achieving our goal of sustainable water management for the benefit of all our peoples.”

Within the six priority areas, following are some of the key aspects of the action plan:

- ?? **Water resources management** Strengthen the capacity of small island countries to conduct water resources assessment and monitoring to improve the integrated management of water resources in catchments with local communities, and permitting the use of appropriate technologies for water supply and sanitation systems and improved approaches for addressing the problems of rural and peri-urban communities.
- ?? **Island vulnerability** Develop the capacity to apply available information to cope with climate variability and change, and transform the paradigm of dealing with island vulnerability from disaster response to one of proactive hazard assessment and risk management, involving local communities.
- ?? **Participation, information and education (awareness)** In order to ensure that all levels of society are aware of the issues at stake and have a voice, it is proposed to adopt national frameworks for the open participation of communities in sustainable water management, to make information more widely available and to mainstream water and sanitation education into formal curricula. Government, civil society and the private sector will be encouraged to work in partnership to involve all stakeholders.
- ?? **Technology** The use of available and appropriate water, sanitation, and wastewater technologies was underlined, and special emphasis will be given to reducing unaccounted for water. Island-specific training programs will be developed.
- ?? **Institution strengthening, inter-agency partnership and governance** To ensure a strong institutional framework for managing water resources in a sustainable manner, national visions, policies, plans and legislation appropriate to each Pacific island country will take into account the particular social, economic, environmental and cultural needs of the citizens of each country. The action plan stresses the need to work together to develop institutional arrangements, for strong national and regional leadership in water resource management, and for regional partnerships in capacity building.
- ?? **Financing policies** National sector plans that identify the economic, social and environmental costs of different services and pricing policies to ensure the proper allocation of resources for water resources management and water services will create a better environment for investment by both the public and private sector. Financially viable enterprises for water supply and sanitation that result in improved performance will be established, ensuring appropriate cost recovery,

tariffs, billing and collection, and financially sound operating systems. Improved operational efficiency should reduce costs. The resources of the private sector will be utilized through public-private partnerships. To ensure access by the poor, the action plan also proposes the development of pro-poor policies that include tariffs with lifeline blocks and transparent and targeted welfare programs.

The 3rd World Water Forum that will be held in Kyoto, Japan, 16-23 March 2003 acknowledges the vulnerability and particular needs of small island countries, and the World Water Council has included the “Water in Small Islands Countries” as one of its themes. The World Water Forum is a global water conference that is convened every three years and brings together water policy decision makers, professionals and stakeholders to address water concerns, raise awareness on critical water issues, and mobilize actions and resources.

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For more information on the Sigatoka meeting, visit www.sopac.org