



Committee on Water
Resources
Ministry of Agriculture of the
Republic of Kazakhstan



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PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:

“Integrated Water Management in the Ili-Balkhash Basin: Joint Solutions and Perspectives”

13 October, Almaty – Nowadays, when the unique Lake Balkhash is facing an immediate threat of drying, the needs of the Ili-Balkhash ecosystem should become an ultimate priority and must be taken into consideration prior to any other consumption needs in the region. Given that the ecological safety of a very vast region is at stake, the Lake should become separate and independent party in negotiations on water allocation to claim a share for sustaining an optimal water level. Only once the size of ecological flow is defined should other water shares for agricultural and industrial needs between the relevant parties be distributed. These are one of the main recommendations of the International Conference “*Integrated Water Management in the Ili-Balkhash Basin: Joint Solutions and Perspectives*” which was held on 11-12 October in Almaty.

This event was organized in the framework of the EU-UNDP project “Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management and Fostering Transboundary Dialogue in Central Asia” with the support of the Committee on Water Resources of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, European Union, OSCE and Center for Health Protection and Eco Design.

This conference brought together scientists, representatives of various state water agencies and institutions, local authorities, NGOs and international organizations. The participants raised a broad range of topics. In particular, such problems as a need to revise existing documents, especially, the agreements with China which regulate water use and preservation of ecosystems of the transboundary rivers were largely discussed. Also, it was stressed by the participants, that to stimulate processes, a more active involvement of the third parties, for instance, international organizations, in the negotiations is needed. In addition, a more active information campaign targeting local population is required to raise awareness on a need of a more responsible use of water and implementation of water saving technologies in agricultural and industrial sectors in the region.

According to the participants, the conference provided a platform for very open and fruitful debates between the authorities, civil sector and scientists. One of the major outcomes of the event is a Resolution which contains recommendations to various institutions on how to optimize preservation efforts in the Ili-Balkhash Basin. In the future, in the framework of the EU-UNDP project “Integrated Water Management in the Ili-Balkhash Basin: Joint Solutions and Perspectives” the document will be brought to the attention of different agencies on local, state and international level for its further realization.

There are more and more serious concerns about the ecology of the Lake Balkhash being expressed by experts, especially having in mind the lessons of the environmental disaster at the Aral Sea. Such scenario becomes even more probable with the Lake entering a natural long-term period of decrease in water level which will last for 20-25 years and while the human population in the region is expanding, and unsustainable human water extraction is continuing. At the same time, the Balkhash Lake is much shallower than the Aral Sea in its best years, meaning that even slight negative changes in the hydrological characteristics of the Lake might make the drain of Balkhash both unavoidable and irreversible.

The project “Promoting IWRM and Fostering Transboundary Dialogue in Central Asia” was launched in 2009 and will run until 2012. Its main objectives are to facilitate the implementation of the IWRM in the region and support regional dialogue on water related matters. The main financial partner of the project is the European Union contributing 1.5 mln. Euro.

To learn more about the project and download the Resolution of the conference, please, visit our website:
www.centralasia.iwlearn.org