

13 November, 2000

**Open Letter from  
ICOLD, IHA and ICID  
on the Final Report of the World Commission on Dams**

On 16 November, the Final Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) will be launched in London. The WCD, established in 1997 on the initiative of The World Bank and the International Union for Conservation (IUCN), consists of 11 commissioners, under the chairmanship of Prof Kader Asmal, Minister of Education for the Republic of South Africa. The WCD has subsequently established a Secretariat and a Forum consisting of 50 members. The three undersigned organizations, the International Commission on Large Dams, the International Hydropower Association, and the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, are all members of that Forum.

The impression may be given that the Forum members have endorsed the Report, but in fact only the Commissioners and the Secretariat of the WCD have been involved in preparing it, and the Forum members have not been given the opportunity to see or review any of the drafts. Our organizations submitted input and position papers, but do not know to what extent this material has been used.

While we commend a study of this magnitude on the environmental, social and economic aspects of water resources development projects, the lack of transparency in the preparation of the final report gives us cause for concern.

It is expected that over the next 25 years, world food production and electricity supply will have to double to meet existing standards in view of the rapidly increasing population. By 2050 an extra 3 billion people will need reliable water and electricity supplies. Development of the world's remaining hydro potential, largely available in the developing countries where it is needed most, can play a substantial role in improving the quality of life, and has inherent environmental benefits in terms of avoided fossil fuel generation and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

We hope that the future needs of societies, especially in developing countries, will be sufficiently taken into account in the Report, so that there is a balanced focus on the positive and negative effects of dams and reservoirs. Any other approach would put unnecessary constraints on the greatly needed sustainable development of water resources and further aggravate the looming world water crisis.

Any infrastructure development inevitably involves a certain degree of change. The construction of dams, and their associated reservoirs and hydroelectric powerplants, creates certain physical and social changes, and a disproportionate amount of attention has focused in recent years on the negative impacts only. Less account has been taken of the benefits of dams and hydro plants and of the knowledge and willingness which exists within the profession to anticipate, mitigate and/or compensate for negative aspects. ICOLD and ICID have prescribed detailed listings, criteria and guidelines for the study of environmental impacts and their mitigation, and IHA, working with the International Energy Agency – Hydropower Agreement, has recently completed a White Paper demonstrating the depth of knowledge in these subjects, and setting out recommendations for best practice.

We hope that the WCD Report will add some constructive material to the vast amount of work already conducted by ICOLD, IHA and ICID in the field of environmental and social aspects, but we would like to stress that this Report is the work of the Commissioners alone, and our organizations can unfortunately not take responsibility for the content of the Report.



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The International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) is a non-governmental International Organization which provides a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience in dam engineering. The Organization leads the profession in ensuring that dams are built safely, efficiently, economically, and without detrimental effects on the environment. ICOLD was founded in 1928 and has National Committees from 80 countries with approximately 6000 individual members, who are practising engineers, geologists and scientists from governmental and private organizations, consulting firms, universities, laboratories and construction companies.

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The Commission is dedicated to enhancing the worldwide supply of food and fibre for all people by improving water and land management and the productivity of irrigated and drained lands through appropriate management of water, environment and the application of irrigation, drainage and flood management techniques. ICID was founded in 1950 and has at present about 80 member countries, covering in total about 95% of the world's land area.

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The International Hydropower Association is a non-governmental, multi-disciplinary, professional association which was created, with the support of UNESCO, to advance knowledge on various aspects of hydropower and to promote best practice. Through its six Permanent Committees, it tackles technical, administrative, social, environmental and financial problems. It aims to increase awareness on the role which hydropower can play in sustainable development, as the most important source of renewable energy.