

**Inspiring
Change**



Strategic Plan

2019–2024





As 2.1 billion people lack access to safely managed water services¹, 4.5 billion are denied the dignity of sanitation², 80% of wastewater flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused³, and about 1.7 billion people live in areas where groundwater resources and/or groundwater-dependent ecosystems are under threat⁴, the water sector faces a strategic inflection point.

We can lament wastewater pollution, or find ways to recover scarce resources from waste. We can feel overwhelmed by the ever-increasing demands to divide finite water for cities, industries, energy, food and nature, or we can develop smart systems and nimble incentives for just and resilient allocation. We can shrink from escalating pressure wrought by global change, or embrace it as an unprecedented opportunity: **the dawn of a golden era for water professionals.**

More than half of humankind now lives and works in cities. Cities are thus the global focal point for how we cope with protracted droughts, flash floods, rising sea levels and escalating heat. So in cities, where we need to figure out how to manage more people with scarcer and less reliable water resources – **the International Water Association (IWA) steps up to nurture, catalyse and deliver innovative solutions.** Yet innovation does not arise exclusively from within; water and sanitation solutions often arrive from beyond the sector, which is why we should welcome outsiders into our fold.

Indeed, the complex water management problems we face now and in the future demand that we reach out beyond narrow approaches to instead build wide institutional bridges between silos, linking outcomes across sectors, and raising awareness and urgency in the political arena. Further, we need to combine leading-edge scientific breakthroughs, technological developments and creative mindsets from the laboratory with the best water management practices in the field. Rather than fear disruptive technologies and thinking, the water sector should adopt them earlier, and at a much faster rate, in order to test, prove and deliver the benefits they can bring.

Sources:

¹ WHO-UNICEF JMP 2017.

² WHO-UNICEF JMP 2017.

³ World Water Development Report, UNESCO, 2017

⁴ Water balance of global aquifers revealed by groundwater footprint, Gleeson et al, 2012, Nature.



A New Strategic Direction

Transformation cannot take place on its own in a vacuum. Rather the ideas for solutions to these challenges will be fomented and rigorously debated among the IWA's institutions and membership. IWA will provide an open, yet ordered platform in which both innovators and adopters of new technologies and approaches can generate creative friction. It will be a place for diffusion, benchmarking and evidence. As more and more people see an increasingly daunting dry future of scarcity and stress, the IWA will grow ever more relevant as **an exemplary oasis providing innovative solutions**. We will continue to link the most promising developments and optimal solutions, sharing the best evidence and outcomes from around the world, seeking a broad community of engaged members while promoting and encouraging language, age and gender diversity.

This strategy learns from and builds upon the previous IWA Strategic Plan 2014-18. It has synthesised multiple consultations with IWA members, the Board of Directors, Strategic Council, Specialist Groups, Young Water Professionals and Governing Members, to whom it is presented for endorsement, and will be supported by the development of a full operational plan. All these processes have clarified how the IWA needs a stronger focus on **membership – the source of inspiration, knowledge and action throughout the association**.

We will achieve for our members a stronger culture of service, and a unique value proposition through:

- **Professional Development programs;**
- **Leadership Development, inside and outside the association;**
- **Agenda setting programmatic work to generate pride in our membership;**
- **Global networking opportunities for members to connect with people and ideas.**





A Rapidly Changing World Requires the IWA to Evolve and Adapt.

Every water professional needs to develop adaptive responses to climate change. The reality of grinding scarcity, punctuated by the sharp frequency and severity of extreme droughts and flooding, push the water sector to the leading edge of innovation, finding ways to unlock the circular economy. Sudden change often nudges us out of our comfort zone. It pushes seasoned hydrologists to study customer service. Trained chemists learn economics. Membrane specialists read about human rights. Utilities become resource miners of wastewater, discovering not only how to extract water but also to recover and even sell new sources of energy, minerals, metals, bioplastics and fertiliser. People who deal in tangible resource interactions of the physical world must prepare for the dawn of “digital water,” and the potential these web-, mobile-, and cloud-based solutions offer to disrupt and truly reshape the water sector for the better.

Water itself may be an emphatically local resource, with uniquely local challenges. Yet **the flow of water-related ideas, innovations and intuitions like the IWA will always transcend borders.** They help rapid developments take shape in economies in transition, allowing Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America to “leap frog” the legacy of old water systems, while established economies will see even more stringent regulations push the boundaries of current practices. Some of the most profound transformations in water management have yet to be imagined, much less tested and developed. Through our broad membership, united by our clear vision, the IWA will help these transformations emerge, achieve scale, and be replicated and adopted to ensure all people enjoy equitable access to water and sanitation for health, while replenishing the natural environment on which our species depends.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) in general, and SDG6 in particular, provide unprecedented political will to address water issues in low-, middle- and high-income countries alike. In developing countries, population growth and rapid urbanisation have intensified demand for water and sanitation services beyond all past thresholds. Meanwhile high-income countries can improve governance, awareness, and anticipation of water challenges.

However, in order to achieve the SDG's, there are many challenges ahead of us. There is a need to identify and mobilize additional financial resources to address the SDG funding gap. Critical to this, is improving the creditworthiness of utilities. **By creating an enabling environment with the right policies, institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks,** utilities can be incentivized to improve their operational and commercial efficiency, leading to enhanced services and credibility.

A second crisis/opportunity comes from human resources – or the lack thereof. The water and especially sanitation sectors are hamstrung by deficiencies in education and training at all levels, crippling our ability and capacity to proceed with the SDG tasks ahead. The IWA will continue to help bridge these human resource capacity gaps by **preparing more and younger professionals in an ongoing regimen;** only then can we guarantee the vast numbers of water professionals needed to deliver on the SDG's.

Beyond slow and incremental improvements, the SDG's for water require a rapid and transformational new approach based on **inclusive governance, assertive political will and diverse leadership.** In that way, we can ensure sustainable access to water and sanitation services not only as an end goal, but also as a means to reduce inequality in cities and communities for all, forever.

By adapting proven approaches to local conditions, infusing old problems with new ventures, and cooperating across scales to foster and diffuse innovation, the IWA will reveal to the world that our glass is not half empty. It's not even half full. Rather, **we empower people to turn conflict into collaboration, and scarcity into abundance,** and ensure the glass overflows with water in ways that benefit human and natural communities alike.





Elevator Pitch

Drawing exceptional professionals from 130 countries, the membership of the International Water Association (IWA) brings together scientists, researchers, technology companies, and water and wastewater utilities, all working to address the world's most urgent water challenges when and where they arise, from ridge to reef and from catchment to tap.

No single individual or technology can address such complex water problems alone. That is why the IWA takes a systems approach. Indeed, for more than seven decades, **the IWA has set the global water agenda by linking research and practice, businesses and governments, hardware and humanities.**

Whether seeking the appropriate price of tap water, decoding the DNA of wastewater, or pushing the envelope of reverse osmosis, IWA members catalyse innovations and elevate best practice from around the world. We accelerate progressive outcomes by demonstrating replicable research findings and sharing practical knowledge across a range of diverse geographical, climatic and socio-cultural settings. The IWA has become an international reference and source of durable water solutions, products and services that are robust and flexible enough to be universally applicable, easily accessible, and locally adaptable.



Vision and Mission

VISION:

A network of water professionals striving for a world in which water is wisely, sustainably and equitably managed.

MISSION:

Promote knowledge and provide agenda-setting leadership for the global water community by:

- Being a catalyst for innovation, knowledge and best practice to the sector, external organisations and opinion leaders;
- Providing experience and leadership in transitioning to sustainable water solutions that are robust and flexible in the face of global change pressures;
- Being an international reference and source of knowledge for sustainable water solutions that are robust and flexible in the face of global change pressures;
- Supporting the global community to pursue their ambitions in relation to water related SDG's.

IWA in 5-Years Time



AN ENGAGED AND BALANCED MEMBERSHIP

The IWA will have an engaged membership that is globally representative of the multiple segments, actors, and practice areas of the water sector.

A SOURCE FOR LEADING-EDGE WATER KNOWLEDGE

The IWA will have strengthened our position as an authoritative source and a global reference point for water knowledge, addressing and informing on emerging and potentially disruptive trends within the sector and wider world.



A SPACE FOR PROFESSIONALS TO EXCHANGE WATER KNOWLEDGE

The IWA will have provided a broad range of professional content and programming that is relevant and widely valued by the water sector worldwide.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The IWA will be playing a pivotal role in bridging the chasm between research and practice to accelerate the development and diffusion of innovation in the global water sector.

A SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG's

The IWA will support and promote the Sustainable Development Goals and strengthen the sector through professional and capacity development so that people and countries can pursue their ambitions in relation to water related SDG's.



Critical Objectives and Strategic Goals

AN ENGAGED AND BALANCED MEMBERSHIP

- Increase the absolute number of members who actively participate in the IWA's strategic activities by making engagement central to membership; develop bespoke membership services and engagement opportunities through a more customer-oriented service culture that better meets members' needs and expectations.
- Increase the number of IWA members from under-represented regions, including from Asia, Africa and Latin America, by offering bespoke membership services and opportunities relevant to their regions and interests.
- Enhance the membership experience for members in well-established regions, including Asia-

Pacific, Europe and North America, by adding value to their networking and knowledge exchange activities.

- Increase the number of young water professional members and develop targeted and well-designed opportunities for them to fulfil their professional and personal aspirations.
- Open IWA membership to additional stakeholders, from within and outside the sector, who are impacting upon the water sector. Engaging groups such as non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and digital technology companies, will extend the IWA's agenda to a broader community of professionals interested in the future of water.

A SOURCE FOR LEADING-EDGE WATER KNOWLEDGE

- Engage and inform the international global water community of the implications of future trends, challenges and opportunities; and create awareness of the need to adapt to global change pressures through a range of mechanisms including journals, books, magazines and communications.
- Promote innovation to address global change and develop solutions and strategies that are robust, adaptable and sustainable and have the capability to cope with uncertainties associated with global change pressures.
- Promote new business and financing models to address the SDG-6 funding gap coupled with a holistic approach to policy reform, institutional arrangements and regulations, that improve the operational and commercial efficiency of utilities.
- Encourage a systems approach to the application of the circular economy, that allows the sector to manage threats associated with global change, through closed loop systems, where water can be cascaded, recovered and reused and energy and nutrients extracted.
- Be an authoritative source and global reference on the emergence, influence and impact of the growing digital water economy that has the potential to reshape the international water sector.

A SPACE FOR PROFESSIONALS TO EXCHANGE WATER KNOWLEDGE

- Actively engage members and sector leaders in IWA content, event and programme development, and embrace emerging technologies to maximise participation from under-represented regions, in a cost-effective and efficient way.
- Provide a range of opportunities for IWA members and other water professionals to publish and share information.
- Combine the expertise of its membership from both developed and developing countries to create innovative solutions and professional content that is grounded in, and tailored to, the local context and meets water sector needs in emerging economies.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

- Develop a program that brings together diverse stakeholders from universities, research foundations, utilities and industry to promote a systems approach that drives innovation and change in the water sector.
- Provide a platform to promote research towards the invention, development, and diffusion of new technologies and services, with the aim of increasing the speed and capacity for technology innovation uptake in the water sector.

- Provide a targeted platform that helps utilities share experiences, recognise and learn from emerging disruption, and adapt and embrace change.
- Develop a more systematic understanding of the IWA network and apply diffusion models to investigate how the network can be better deployed to speed innovation uptake in the water sector.

A SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG's

- Working with the IWA membership, and through concrete actions with our Governing Members, encourage the international water sector to focus on ways to achieve sustainable development, and provide a platform to help us understand and communicate the breadth of value delivered by the international water sector.
- Support and promote the agenda of the SDG's, including addressing gaps for investments and prioritising bridging the human resource capacity gap, required to achieve the SDG's.
- Support IWA members and other stakeholders to increase their capability and capacity to achieve SDG6 through their work.



Operationalising this Strategy

To create an association that works for its members, and to achieve its vision and mission, the IWA will make **member engagement central to all our activities**. An operational plan (with timelines where appropriate), will be developed to implement this strategy.

We will maximise member engagement by the smart use of data and metrics. Collecting, tracking and analysing membership data, including in our regional operations (with an appropriate privacy policy), will allow us to better identify membership segments and **tailor value propositions for a more personalised membership experience**. It will also help determine the best retention strategies and customer service culture.

Placing membership engagement at the heart of all our activities implies both a shift in the mind-set of the organisation, and a reconfiguration of the secretariat structure. In turn, this places more emphasis, and greater time allocation, on delivering added value to members; but also supports the **aspirational desire of members to see their association as a thought leader, setting agendas and delivering a global vision they can support**.

Viewed through the prism of our members' expectations and needs, supported by strong data analysis, and with the optimal structures in place, the IWA will become a more dynamic association, further building its global constituency and world-class reputation.



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