Recommendations

Headline Recommendation
Create incentives for water users, including irrigators, to use water efficiently, not to pollute water, and to promote its reuse.

Detailed Recommendations

- Focus on measures to improve water use efficiency for resilient economies. Leaders should enhance efficient use of water through a national policy framework that creates incentives for water users, including irrigators, to not waste or pollute water, and to promote its reuse, drawing on guidance materials prepared under the HLPW Water Use Efficiency for Resilient Economies and Societies Roadmap.

- Encourage the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to develop and adopt an international standard for water efficiency labelling of domestic appliances that use water and explore similar standards for agricultural and industrial equipment.

Challenges

Many countries are endeavoring to manage water scarcity, where demand for water exceeds renewable and affordable supply. Even in countries with a positive water balance overall, there are usually locations or regions which do have scarcity due to increasing demand, climate change affecting supply, or a combination of these factors. This can constrain economic development and social cohesion, and national capacity to achieve the water-related SDGs.

Through continuous improvements in water use efficiency, including from increased water re-use and maximizing the social value from every drop of the water, it is possible to mitigate these risks. This objective is further supported by the HLPW’s work on ‘valuing water’ (refer to “Value Water”).

Achieving improved efficiency can be politically challenging where there may be resistance to measures that place a price on water commensurate to its social value, or regulatory measures that require a lower consumption of water, particularly if there will economic consequences.

Principles for approaching the problems

To respond to the above challenges, the HLPW has proposed a set of practical measures that are potentially beneficial regardless of how governments decide to manage the distribution of the resultant benefits. These measures have been developed on the basis that improvements in water use efficiency can maximize the social value from every drop of water.

Governments are encouraged to put in place policy settings that create incentives for water users to use water efficiently and not wastefully. The Australian Water Partnership’s ‘WaterGuide’ is already available to assist governments with appropriate policy settings for creating incentives to use water efficiently.

To have the most effect on water use, focus is needed on the largest water uses, by volume and by cost. The largest uses by volume are for irrigation and for the environment. Guidance materials are being prepared by the Australian Water Partnership on improving the efficiency of water use by irrigation and the environment.
The largest water uses by cost are the provision of clean and safe urban supply. To provide consumers with better information, allowing them to choose the most water efficient household appliances, it is proposed that an international standard on water efficiency labelling of domestic water using fittings and appliances be developed through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). This standard can be implemented by governments to shift, over time, the mix of installed water using products such as taps, showers, toilets, and washing machines to increase household water use efficiency as well as reduce water use costs for consumers and, indirectly, for water supply utilities. Such labelling standards are already mandated in a number of countries including China, Australia, and Singapore.

Innovation is needed in technologies (including in water metering) that lower the cost of becoming more water efficient, and in policy and regulatory measures that are affordable, efficient, and enforceable.

Contributions of the Panel

The HLPW Action Plan (September 2016) identified the challenge of increasing water scarcity under its theme of 'resilient economics, societies and disaster risk reduction'. The Action Plan also identified a 'priority action' of encouraging states and organizations to focus on measures to improve water use efficiency for resilient economies, climate change, and human settlement by encouraging and including new technologies and policy reforms.

The HLPW’s Water Use Efficiency for Resilient Economies and Societies Roadmap (June 2017) set out the proposed approach to these issues, as described in the recommendations above, including a forward workplan.

The Water Use Efficiency proposals, as set out above, have subsequently been presented and promoted on behalf of the Panel to the global water community at several major events.

As their Prime Ministers are Panel members, Australia and Jordan are working together on the practical application of Water Guide principles. Discussions are also underway with other Panel member countries, Mexico and Senegal.

Practical guidance materials on water use efficiency by the irrigation sector and for the environment, are being prepared by Australia for release in 2018.

Following advocacy by Australia as a Panel member, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has approved a work item for the preparation of an International Standard on Efficiency Labelling. This standard will assist manufacturers of these specified products to transact in a common market, enabling competition and encouraging best practice, and giving consumers choice.

Findings and conclusions

Of the guidance materials referenced in the Water Use Efficiency for Resilient Economies and Societies Roadmap, the first product, known as ‘WaterGuide’ is available. Australia will arrange launch and distribution on behalf of the HLPW. Guidance for the irrigation sector and for environmental water management will also be finalized and distributed by Australia.

The HLPW’s water use efficiency proposals will also be promoted at the World Water Forum in Brasilia, March 2018.