



## Joint press release: Landmark project to counteract deteriorating water quality in ecosystems launched at the Budapest Water Summit

**BUDAPEST, 10 October 2013** – In an attempt to improve the sustainable management of global water resources, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in collaboration with the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and the Global Water Systems Project (GWSP) will launch the **International Water Quality Guidelines for Ecosystems (IWQGES)** project today at the Budapest Water Summit.

The health of ecosystems is being severely threatened by the declining quality and quantity of water resources due to the consequences of human population growth, unsustainable development, land use and water management as well as climate change. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) found that aquatic ecosystems are deteriorating faster than many other natural systems; this is reflected in findings that biodiversity loss is highest amongst aquatic species.

“We are delighted to be undertaking this important project with UNEP,” said Prof. Dr. Jakob Rhyner, Director of UNU-EHS, “The goal of these empirically derived Guidelines is to trigger actions from international and national authorities towards the protection and improvement of ecosystem health by providing governments with useful tools to establish high water quality standards for their ecosystems. The guidelines are a crucial first step towards comprehensive water quality standards, targeted monitoring programmes and further research.”

At present, international guidelines exist for drinking water, recreational use, irrigation, livestock, and water reuse, among others. No comparable international water quality standards exist for ecosystems. The IWQGES project aims at develop a set of voluntary, scientifically-based policy and technical guidelines, enabling regional, national, and local authorities to improve their frameworks for sustainable management of their water resources and aquatic ecosystems.

“The quality of water in our ecosystems is a global concern. Its deterioration threatens to cause large scale changes in water use, biodiversity, and ecosystem health and functioning that will affect us all,” states IWQGES project manager Prof. Dr. Janos Bogardi (GWSP). “This project comes at a crucial time where comprehensive and practical guidelines for water quality for our ecosystems are desperately needed.”

UNEP has prioritized addressing the global water quality challenge and earlier this year the UNEP Governing Council has adopted decision GC 27/3 to develop international water quality guidelines for ecosystems. Economic development is leading to intensifying degradation of water quality which poses a risk to public health, food security, and the economy.

In the first phase of the project, a Drafting Group of internationally recognized scientists will develop the preliminary guidelines. An Advisory Group of experts and policy makers constituted by UNEP as well as stakeholder consultations will then support the work of the Drafting Group in further developing and finalizing the guidelines. Scientific communities and institutions as well as practitioners will be invited to contribute.

This comprehensive project will address both issues of water quality, including chemical, biological, and biodiversity aspects and issues of water quantity including availability, changes over time and morphology of bodies of water.

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