

Experts call on governments, industries and the water and trade research communities

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With greater water scarcity in some regions and increasing global demand for high quality water, international trade agreements need to help save water globally. This was the main conclusion of a special report, published by the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education.

The special report follows a strategic workshop on "[water](#) scarcity and pollution in the rules of international trade" held on 25th - 26th November 2010. Co-sponsored by the European Science Foundation and the United Nations Environmental Programme, it covered issues and challenges regarding the linkages between water management and international trade.

Traditionally, water resources management has been dealt with from the local, river basin or national perspective. Even if it is increasingly recognised that water governance has a global dimension, the links between international trade and freshwater scarcity and demand are rarely analysed. Water is seldom the dominant factor determining trade in water-intensive commodities, but it becomes increasingly important in the context of a growing global demand for water-intensive products, such as [cereal crops](#), and increasing [water scarcity](#) in various regions of the world.

The introduction of new concepts such as 'virtual water' by Tony Allan (1993) and 'water footprint' by Arjen Hoekstra (2003) have opened new dimensions for better water management considering supply-chains and consumption viewpoint. National water footprint and virtual water trade

accounting could be included in national water statistics, supporting the formulation of national water plans and river basin plans that are coherent with national policies on, for example, the environment, agriculture, industry, energy, trade, foreign affairs and international cooperation.

International trade presently involves a significant part of products for which production is water-intensive. In order to protect and preserve freshwater resources and reduce negative impacts on the environment and socioeconomic systems, the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation will have to address the link between international trade and sustainable water use.

"We are only at the very beginning of a scientific understanding of the relationship between freshwater management and [international trade](#)," stated Arjen Hoekstra, Scientific Director of the [Water Footprint Network](#). "As such, an important challenge is to develop interdisciplinary conceptual and analytical frameworks that enable us to have a more thorough and integrated understanding."

More information: The special report 'Accounting for water scarcity and pollution in the rules of international trade' is available online at: [www.waterfootprint.org/Reports ... shop-Water-Trade.pdf](http://www.waterfootprint.org/Reports...shop-Water-Trade.pdf)

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