



The Glasgow Declaration for Fair Water Footprints for climate resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development

A COP26 Initiative, November 2021

Frequently asked questions

1. What are fair water footprints?

The global production and consumption of food, clothes and other goods have a major influence on society's climate and water-challenges, and their solutions. The water used within farms, factories, and mines, and for the growing, extraction and processing of raw materials can cause pollution and resource degradation and depletion, which means less water of poorer quality, and therefore greater vulnerability to climate variability, drought, disease, and conflict. The 'embedded' water, or 'water footprint' of consumer goods and international trade links consumer and producer economies, and provides us with a new and exciting opportunity for positive change.

Our water footprints shape water and climate security for millions of people. This influence can be negative where water is used irresponsibly, or it can be a force for progress. Fair water footprints are about people, communities, companies, investors, and governments working together to trigger positive change by ensuring that everything we produce and consume 'does no harm' and 'does good' for water security, climate resilience and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. A fair water footprint means:

- **Zero pollution**
- **Sustainable and equitable withdrawal and water use**
- **Full access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for workers**
- **Working with and protecting nature**
- **Planning for droughts and floods.**

This short animation captures in two minutes what a fair water footprint is, and why it is important. <https://youtu.be/TuBQYfAZbHY> Note that fair water footprints differ from carbon footprints in that they are all about sustainable and responsible use of water, not reduction.

2. ***Why are Fair Water Footprints important now, at COP26?***

Without radically improved water management, our vulnerability to disease, conflict, climate change and an intensifying cycle of flooding and drought events will continue to escalate, condemning current and future generations to almost continual catastrophe. Economic activity will be severely constrained (according to the World Bank, by up to 6% of GDP annually), and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity will continue to see the most rapid rates of decline. Marginalised communities, women, and those already in poverty will be affected most severely.

Shared water security – through good water governance, adequate investment, and widespread water stewardship by all water users - is the solution that will provide the resilience needed to respond to the climate emergency, the nature crisis, and facilitate social justice, disease control and low-carbon growth trajectories.

Time is running out. As the climate emergency escalates, we have a once in a generation opportunity to change the way we interact with water and to harness the power of our water footprints - as individuals, companies, and countries - to ensure that they drive fair, sustainable and resilient water use. Investors and multinational corporations influence as much as 70% of the world's water use and employ one in five of the global workforce. Much of this use and many of these workers are in the catchments, communities and cities which face the greatest water and climate challenges on earth. The opportunity to harness that reach and influence for good is therefore significant.

3. ***What is the background to the initiative – where has it come from?***

This initiative builds on work by many organisations and individuals over the past two decades, on virtual water, water footprint, climate adaptation, water stewardship, corporate disclosure, and governance. It owes particular credit to landmark research by Professor Tony Allen, winner of the Stockholm Water Prize in 2008, and Professor Arjen Hoekstra and his team at the Water Footprint Network. It also draws on the practice of stewardship, and there are multiple inspiring examples from around the world of what can be achieved when companies and investors purposefully seek to use water responsibly, and to contribute to shared water security and climate resilience.

Many of the tools and techniques for ensuring fair water footprints have been developed and tested. The priority now is to scale these to establish water stewardship as the business norm globally, through bold leadership and stronger market, financial and regulatory incentives. COP 26 provides us with a political opportunity to make rapid progress and to harness the high-level commitment needed for this transition. It offers a breakthrough moment where these concepts and practices can fulfil their potential to accelerate delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals, and to shape a more resilient, sustainable, just and water-secure world.

4. ***Who is behind this initiative?***

The initiative is currently being supported by many partners including the governments of the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria and Malawi, along with the African Civil Society Network for Water and Sanitation (ANEWS), CDP, Water Witness, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Chatham House. Each of these organisations sees the urgent need for change, and the opportunity to trigger transformative change at COP.

We are acutely aware of the need for balanced participation and co-ownership by a much wider range of stakeholders, and you are very warmly invited to join and collaborate in this effort.

5. *Engaging the private sector on water? Is this about privatisation, or is there a risk of policy capture?*

This initiative has nothing to do with privatisation of water services. It is about engaging companies and business sectors that use large amounts of water, the investors, and customers behind them, as well as the governments that regulate them, to ensure that we are all doing all we can to ensure the equitable, resilient, and sustainable use of water.

Engaging the private sector in social and environmental governance is not without risk because of the unequal distribution of power and resources between stakeholders, and the privileged access to decision making and resource access that can result. Adherence to the [Principles of Responsible Corporate Engagement in Water Policy](#) and [Integrity Guidelines for Water Stewardship Initiatives](#) which provide for credible and accountable partners, working through inclusive and transparent processes, towards demonstrable ‘public good’ outcomes will be a central and critical feature of the initiative.

6. *What is the strategic intent behind the initiative and declaration?*

The core partners are inviting others to join an open collaborative effort to transform how the global economy interacts with the water environment and the resilience of local communities. We are targeting action by all stakeholders to ensure that the water footprints which they have control over and influence upon will be sustainable, resilient, and fair by 2030. Our goal is intentionally ambitious. We aim to inspire the leadership needed to move from currently unsustainable and unfair resource use which pushes us into vulnerability, towards sustainable and just water use which builds resilience to climate, disease, and other shocks.

Through the declaration and subsequent action plan we aim to establish political commitment and trigger system change towards fair water footprints. At the heart of this effort will be exploring novel mechanisms and new ways to stimulate responsible use of water, for example: through due diligence and disclosure of water performance to support investment decision making; the use of standards, labels and consumer awareness; reformed regulations and rules which mean consistent adherence to progressive policy on water, and support for collaborative action.

The Declaration itself is intended to signal the leadership and ambition that will inspire others and move them to join this effort. It will set out a range of joint and individual commitments that each constituency can get behind, plan towards and report against over the next decade. We intend to expand the partnership and to support the efforts of all partners through detailed planning and programming, and importantly, resourcing for this work in the months ahead.

7. *Why should I get involved – how is it relevant to me?*

The relevance and benefits of the initiative for each constituency is set out here:

Constituency	Relevance and benefits
Government and gov agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New collaboration, alignment, investment, and effort from multiple actors to ensure sustainable, equitable and resilient use of water meet the expectations of national constituencies; support international development towards peace, prosperity, social justice, and security; and to implement Nationally Determined Contributions. • Ensuring resilience and de-risking of priority economic, investment and job creation sectors in relations to operational, environmental, and social/reputational risks linked to climate and water.
Businesses, investors and financiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New collaborative effort to maximise resilience and mitigate multiple water and climate related risks within local and global supply chains, portfolios, and supply chains. • Demonstration of global leadership role in response to the water, climate, and nature crises.
Civil society organisations and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New collaborative effort and accountability mechanisms to ensure that the needs and rights of underrepresented communities and nature are prioritised and protected by economic water users, and that efforts towards SDG6 are aligned adequately resourced and championed.
External support and research/knowledge agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New collaborative opportunity to scale methods, knowledge, partnerships, resources and research-into-use for significant public good outcomes.
Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action to ensure that your consumption and wellbeing, your pension fund and investments don't negatively impact the water environment, nature or communities.

8. Who will sign the declaration?

We have discussed the pros and cons of having only governments vs. multiple stakeholders sign the declaration. Given the nature of the declaration, the decision has been that it should be collaborative – we need governments, companies, financial institution, civil society and external support agencies to be on board and be mutually accountable if we are to achieve the goal of fair water footprints by 2030.

Signing the declaration has challenging implications that should not be underestimated. The declaration commits each constituency to taking significant and measurable actions. We invite each constituency to help shape the content so that their priorities are reflected and that the commitments are appropriate. Please get in touch if you are interested to become a signatory, or if you would like to find out more.

We are also aiming for balanced participation across each constituency to reflect our commitment to integrity and inclusive engagement. There will be future opportunities to collaborate, support and join this effort

9. What will happen after COP26? How do I get involved, and how do I ensure my/our voice is heard?

COP 26 is just the start. With partners we will begin the process of mapping out and implementing tactics and action plans for fair water footprints, and securing any additional resources needed. Funding has already been committed to this initiative by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and others. The partners will report against agreed indicators and will meet to review and accelerate progress at least annually. We invite you to join us in this vital and world-changing endeavour.

10. Is there any further reading?

If you're interested to read, or watch further, then please find links to additional background material. A recently published reading pack and video for decision makers from K4D/IDS/Water Witness is available [here](#), and a non-exhaustive list of other material is listed below.

- > Water Witness International <https://waterwitness.org/>
- > CDP <https://www.cdp.net/en>
- > Alliance for Water Stewardship <https://a4ws.org/>

Water governance, the global water crisis, and climate emergency

- > UNDP (2006). Human Development Report 2006. Beyond scarcity: power, poverty and the global water crisis. New York NY: United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/267/hdr06-complete.pdf>
- > World Bank Group (2016). High and dry: Climate change, water, and the economy. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/publication/high-and-dry-climate-change-water-and-the-economy>

Virtual water and water footprinting

- > Allan, T. (2011). Virtual water: Tackling the threat to our planet's most precious resource. London: Taurus.
- > Hoekstra, A. Y. and Mekonnen, M. M. (2016). Imported water risk: The case of the UK. Environmental Research Letters 11(5) 055002. Retrieved from: https://waterfootprint.org/media/downloads/Imported_water_risk-the_case_of_the_UK.pdf
- > Hoekstra, A. Y. and Mekonnen, M. M. (2011). The water footprint of humanity. PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, February, 109(9), 3232–7. Retrieved from: <https://www.pnas.org/content/109/9/3232>
- > Rosa, L., et al. (2019). Global unsustainable virtual water flows in agricultural trade. Environmental Research Letters 14 114001. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ab4bfc>

Water stewardship

- > Hepworth, N. and Orr, S. (2013). [Corporate water stewardship: New paradigms in collaborative water governance](#). In B. Lankford, K. Bakker, M. Zeitoun & D. Conway (Eds.), Water security: Principles, perspectives and practices. London: Earthscan Publications.

Principles and standards

- > Alliance for Water Stewardship (2018). The AWS Standard 2.0. Retrieved from: <https://a4ws.org/the-aws-standard-2-0/>
- > [CEO Water Mandate. \(2010\). Guide to responsible business engagement with water policy. Oakland CA: Pacific Institute and United Nations Global Compact.](#)

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