



EUREAU position paper regarding the ISO/TC 224 project “Service standards relating to drinking water supply and sewerage”

EUREAU is the Union of National Associations of Water Suppliers and Waste Water services from the EU and EFTA countries, which collectively supply water services to about 400 million people.

EUREAU takes a vital interest in supporting drinking water supply and wastewater treatment utilities in optimising their service and maintaining the full confidence of their customers. EUREAU can therefore contribute its knowledge and experience of the different management systems within the EU into the ISO project.

EUREAU's willingness to participate in this project also complements its commitment to provide knowledge, experience and expertise in the management of water and waste water services to support the European Union in the development of the EU water initiative aimed at the implementation of the Millennium Goal.

In summary, EUREAU's key expectations for the ISO/TC 224 project now in preparation are that it:

- Should provide clear advantages to both water utilities and their customers, and
- Must emphasise the importance of transparency in the relation between water industries (whether private or public) and their clients.

We believe that the project has the potential to fulfil EUREAU's goal of assuring good service provided that the following points are taken into account.

Efficiency

Providing good services at reasonable cost is the basis of accountable water and sewerage works. The implementation of service standards would be a suitable way of promoting best practice in order to improve the quality of standards. From our point of view the standards should consist of very simple indicators, and be easy to understand and implement.

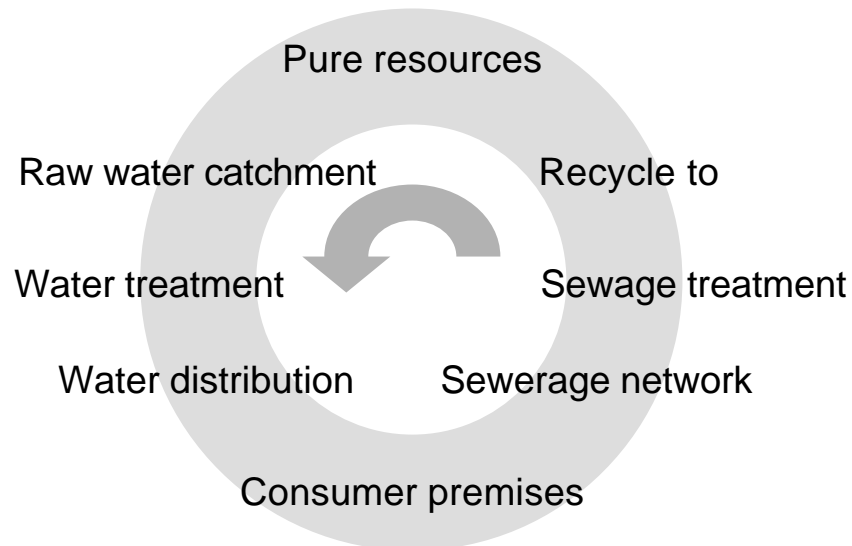
The costs and benefits of the standardisation outcome should be in a balanced relationship. The standards should help to further optimise service without leading to incomprehensibly higher costs to customers of water supply and wastewater treatment utilities.

Responsibility

Delivery of satisfactory drinking water service and provision of a sewerage and sewage treatment service which protects both public health and the environment, are complex processes. For water supply and wastewater services the main activities are set out below.

For the overall service to be effective requires close collaboration between a range of different organisations including water operators, environmental authorities, property owners, municipalities and Government.

In deriving standards for water and wastewater service it is therefore important that the relative responsibilities of the different organisations are clearly defined. For example the quality of water provided by the water supplier to a property might be perfectly acceptable, but the quality might deteriorate within the property pipework.



Consideration of national and local conditions

The scale and condition of the water infrastructure will vary considerably between countries. In more developed countries the infrastructure is likely to be extensive but may need considerable investment to maintain or upgrade to modern standards. In less developed countries first time provision of water service infrastructure may be more of an issue. In developing an international standard for water services it is therefore important to ensure that sufficient flexibility exists to take account of the scale and condition of the water infrastructure and local priorities for improvement, balanced against available finance.

In more developed countries in particular, there already exist a broad array of national standards, professional technical rules and legal regulations. Although the application of these standards is voluntary, the project needs to respect the fact that many countries have to fulfil legally binding or contractually fixed requirements. This means that in formulating standards there is no choice but to take into account the many national variations already in existence.

Factors such as culture, social customs and geographic conditions influence the function of utilities and the needs of customers. As a consequence, creating service standards, which address the conditions of every country in detail, is nearly impossible. Similarly, in many rural parts of the world (both developed and less developed) provision of water services is not through piped networks but through local drinking water wells and local sewage disposal system e.g. cesspit. Any standard must be sufficiently flexible to reflect the widely differing nature of water services in such areas and distinguish between piped and discrete local water services. Therefore, the limiting of standardisation to basic service requirements, which would correspond, to the common interest of all member states should be considered.

Feasibility of service standards

Based on the business plan to be adopted for the ISO/TC 224 project, numerous countries have already sent to ISO their suggestions for elaborating service standards. The amassed volume of input is now comprehensive and complex. Past experience with European quality standards shows that such large projects that try to consolidate existing standards for other countries have not been successful within a reasonable timeframe. This would be another reason to restrict the ISO work to essential and simple service requirements that could be met by every country.

Emphasis on individual optimisation

The standards should support water works and wastewater treatment works in providing their customers with good service, but the standards should not impose on companies any particular mandated form of organisation. The desired outcome is that utilities remain free to organise their service individually in such a way as to take account of local situations and to maximise efficiency in their particular circumstances.

Performance indicators

Performance indicators can be a tool in judging consumer satisfaction, as long as they are adapted to the circumstances of each individual country.

In view of the fact that many sophisticated benchmarking systems and procedures with detailed performance indicators have been applied in the member countries, the TC 224 project should not find it necessary to create yet another system. Many countries have developed their own systems which should not be discarded. The project should focus more on elaborating guidelines and performance criteria than quantitative performance indicators. It would be sufficient to suggest possible performance indicators which could be integrated into existing benchmarking systems in order to improve them.

Performance indicators are not meant to be used by authorities in a regulatory framework. Rather, they should serve as tools to help customers evaluate their drinking water, sewerage and sewage treatment services and to help the service operators to optimise their own functions.