



STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030





INTRODUCTION

Concerns globally about water, this vital element, are there for all to see. These span water scarcity, access to water supply and sanitation, the need for treatment of used water, the degradation of water quality, prospects for aquatic habitats and species, and the widening of issues of concern, such as PFAS and antimicrobial resistance. This is all against a backdrop of governance and funding issues, and a changing climate and the associated shifts in flood and drought patterns.

But there are many opportunities to act – from new and emerging solutions through to actions already proven to work in one location and with great potential to be taken up elsewhere. These opportunities come in many shapes, spanning technologies, through to management frameworks, through to overarching regulation and policy directions. Not only do they deliver direct water-related benefits, there are broader societal and environmental gains.



The International Water Association exists to bring together and connect the people behind these many solutions.

When we talk of water, this includes dimensions of the natural and human water cycle such as surface and underground water resources. It includes the vital provision of water supply and sanitation services. And it extends to urban drainage, and the whole reach of environmental, health and sustainability dimensions, all with a particular relevance in the urban context. Across this spectrum, our work to bring together those able to contribute to solutions is rooted in an ethos of supporting the development and sharing of knowledge. More than this, our aim is to nurture the needed capacity and institutions to advance its application around the world.

This is a Strategic Plan born of urgency, but also one born of optimism.

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This Strategic Plan builds on those that have preceded it, especially the previous one (2019-2024). Success in advancing those ambitions has positioned our member-led organisation as never before – with membership in more countries than ever, with representation through our Governing Members in more countries than ever, and with a growing presence and participation of younger professionals reflected in a greater number of young water professional country chapters than ever.

This Strategic Plan sets out a course to harness the capabilities and ambitions of our members, building partnerships and collaborations with other water and allied professionals and organisations, especially at a regional level, and directing these efforts to the many water-related challenges around the world.

The plan's five-year window is a crucial one. It spans the remaining years to the 2030 deadline set for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Meanwhile, the significance of water is increasingly being acknowledged in the global climate change agenda – rightly so, given that the impacts that will be felt due to climate change and the actions needed to adapt are to a great extent rooted in water.

So this is a Strategic Plan born of urgency, but also one born of optimism – that we can and will secure progress.



Strategic Plan 2025-2030

DEPTH AND DIVERSITY

escalating
our ambitions

As a global membership association, our challenge and opportunity is to find the paths to best help effect change at scale around the world, channelling insights and exchanges towards application in local and regional contexts.

Our foundation is one of knowledge generation, both on issues of concern and on the opportunities to respond to those issues. This goes well beyond research. We increasingly provide a trusted platform to capture and present leading practice from all corners of the world. This foundation has provided the basis for our strategic ambitions. Now is the time to add even greater depth and diversity to those foundations.

It is a time for enabling and empowering, and doing so across our spectrum of water interests.

We will continue to link the most promising developments and optimal solutions, sharing the best evidence and outcomes from around the world, seeking a broad community of engaged members. This is all the while promoting and encouraging diversity with respect to language, age and gender.

We will better amplify this by expanding our Governing Member base, better empowering those willing to leverage the opportunities of connecting with our global network. We will harness the insight and ambition of young water professionals, further facilitating the member-led creation and running of young water professional chapters as an engine for their participation, supporting broadening of the IWA network at a local level.

We will also advance actions positioning IWA as the natural global home for water and wastewater utilities, sustaining engagement with this community on an ongoing basis. Running through all of this, the strategy for the years ahead learns from and builds upon the previous IWA Strategic Plan. This previous strategy had an important theme at its core: the need for a stronger focus on membership – the source of inspiration, knowledge and action throughout the association.

This vital element remains central to this new plan – meeting the needs of our established membership base, while at the same time extending our membership. This means continuing to build a stronger culture of service, and progressing the core activities underpinning our unique, global value proposition. This means global networking opportunities for members to connect with people and ideas.

It means agenda-setting programmatic work that increasingly engages our membership and draws upon its energies and capabilities through activities such as mentoring. And it means expanding and deepening the opportunities we provide for professional and leadership development, equipping our network to connect with others and extend its reach and influence.

ANTICIPATE AND LEAD

IWA's contribution in a changing world



Our global membership, spanning research and practice, makes IWA an access point on the spectrum of real-world needs and challenges faced around water. So too on the latest thinking on how to respond to these needs and challenges, and to mobilise the capacity and institutions to do so.

As we look to escalate our ambitions around our core interests of water supply and sanitation and water's environmental, health and sustainability dimensions, we must also remain alert to shifting real-world needs and challenges. These present a moving target that IWA, as a nimble, member-led organisation, is ideally placed to provide leadership on. They are many and varied, but two themes highlight the urgency that IWA finds its focus on these targets and hits its mark.

Climate change demands greater attention. Its impacts are becoming ever-more apparent and efforts to escalate policy-driven responses continue. With climate impacts felt to a great extent through water, the need to deliver adaption measures is expanding. Meanwhile, mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions is needed wherever possible.

Cities are at the frontline of the climate agenda. They need to advance resilience and security for their citizens. As homes to an ever-growing proportion of the world's population, they are also engines of mitigation efforts. Meanwhile, water and wastewater utilities need to evolve as adapted and resilient organisations and in parallel understand and act on their opportunities to contribute on mitigation.



In the face of this, utilities can become energy net-positive. Cities can advance options such as rainwater harvesting, nature-based solutions, and 'sponge cities'. These are just some of the options. IWA's opportunity is to demonstrate leadership in helping to put those solutions in the spotlight, developing and shaping options relevant to diverse contexts around the world, and building networks and collaborations to advance them.

Alongside the changes that climate is bringing to the global agenda, the decades-old call for greater global progress on access to safe water and adequate sanitation continues. Population growth is one reason behind the stubborn access gap. The positive side to this is that large numbers of people are actually gaining access. These gains need to be ramped up. And true access means more than a one-time connection – it means sustained access for both water supply, which means tackling the huge extent to which supplies are intermittent, and for sanitation.

These gaps on basics needs will increasingly be in the spotlight as the 2030 UN SDG deadline closes in. IWA has a vital contribution to make in this period, not least through its Specialist Groups and the opportunity to expand our national relevance through growth of our Governing Members. And with the needs of many unlikely to be met by 2030, IWA will make its voice heard as the world looks to build a development agenda for post-2030.

Answering the call of these challenges means finding ways to break out of the established and expected approaches that are typically employed – from the technologies to the policies and organisational set-ups. If there is one opportunity that cuts across the water tasks ahead, it is the use of digital technologies. From the equipment and solutions deployed, to the data that can be gathered and mined, through to the new breed of digitally-capable water professionals, there is a digital revolution underway and IWA is ideally placed to grow its position as the go-to organisation for global digital water connections. Digitalisation will increasingly influence every facet of water management – from satellite-enabled solutions and catchment-scale approaches through to data-driven optimisation of treatment processes and infrastructure maintenance. IWA can lead the way shaping solutions developed by and applied in diverse contexts around the world.

Digital opportunities are also at the heart of how the Association itself can and must evolve over the coming five years. Expectations of members, especially younger ones, are changing. Gone is the expectation that a passive, one-size-fits-all offering will suffice. Rather, members expect options that fit more closely with their professional needs and interests. Use of digital will be vital to answering this call – ensuring IWA remains relevant and, importantly, draws members and a wider audience to it in the face of ever-growing competition. Digital opportunities will also underpin IWA's actions to 'walk the talk' on being a sustainability-conscious Association, capitalising on the rise in virtual exchanges and participation to spread our influence without this being at the expense of the environment. But in the world of digital, five years is a long time. Advances, such as those in translation capabilities, stand to transform our networking and knowledge exchange opportunities. It is vital therefore that IWA becomes more agile, armed with the ability and capacity to pivot where necessary.

Anticipating all the above, our strategic vision for the years ahead aligns our anticipation of the issues that will demand attention with our ambitions as to the part that IWA can play in being a catalyst for change on those issues, engaging and empowering our membership and extending influence beyond our immediate network. We will continue to support activity on multiple agendas across the water spectrum on which we excel – our core focus on water supply and sanitation, anything from river basins, to resource recovery, to health, to the environment, to utility management, and cross-cutting themes such as sustainability and capacity development. At the same time, we will drive attention towards particular strategic windows of opportunity, especially where new landscapes are coming into view.

Digitalisation will increasingly influence every facet of water management.

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A GLOBAL VOICE ON WATER



IWA's power comes from its position as an open, member-led platform able to bring together the best minds and those with the most relevant insights and experience.

Drawing exceptional professionals from more than 140 countries, the membership of the International Water Association (IWA) brings together scientists, researchers, water and wastewater utilities, services and technology companies, and the wider range of stakeholders such as regulators, policy makers and major users, all with a part to play in addressing the world's most urgent water challenges.

No one individual or technology can address water problems alone. Water is all about connections. One use impacts another. Each user affects another. IWA's power comes from its position as an open, member-led platform able to bring together the best minds and those with the most relevant insights and experience. This is supported by a systems-led view that advances joined-up thinking and decision-making and helps us identify strategic opportunities to craft and provide the tools needed for practical progress.

IWA is a global leader on water-related knowledge creation and dissemination, not least through publications, events, programmes, and thematic networks. Through such activities, IWA members shine a light on emerging concerns, catalyse innovations and elevate best practice from around the world. We accelerate progressive outcomes by demonstrating replicable research findings and sharing practical knowledge across a range of diverse geographical, climatic and socio-cultural settings. Combined, it makes IWA a trusted international reference and source of impactful solutions to the world's water challenges.

OUR VISION

**A world in which water
is wisely, sustainably
and equitably managed.**

OUR MISSION

To grow and empower a member network of water and allied professionals, channelling the network's energy and insights.

To develop and disseminate knowledge and good practices.

Drive innovation, build capacity, and nurture leadership.

Support action by the global community on the SDGs and climate change and preparations for the post-2030 agenda.



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IWA IN FIVE YEARS' TIME our Objectives



Driving Change

Uniting Voices for Water Sustainability

Sustain a vibrant, diverse membership across IWA's spectrum of water interests, promoting connectivity, inclusivity, impact, influence, professional growth, and shared success within the global water community.

Elevating Water Wisdom

Leading the Charge for Sustainability

Solidify our role as a trusted authority and global hub for water knowledge, adeptly addressing and raising awareness on core water supply and sanitation needs, of wider emerging trends and issues, and championing sustainable outcomes worldwide through pioneering thought leadership and impactful programmes.

Empowering Solutions

Tailored Content for the Global Water Sector

Have diligently curated and delivered an expansive spectrum of professional content and programming, bolstered by empowering our members, and precisely tailored to meet the evolving demands of the water sector around the world.

Global Collaboration


for Water Innovation and Leadership Development

Leverage the participation of global leaders in research and practice in its network to drive water sector innovation, advancing governance and partnerships to achieve this, while at the same time supporting strengthening of sector capacity and leadership to facilitate tangible progress.

Navigating the World's Water Challenges

Leading Advocacy and Collaboration

We will strengthen our position as a leading advocate for water within global communities, prioritising informed action on the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change, while also preparing for the post-2030 agenda, by fostering a secure environment for sharing water management knowledge and celebrating impactful collaborations.



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IMPLEMENTING THE OBJECTIVES our Strategic Goals

IWA

Driving Change

Uniting Voices for Water Sustainability

- 1.1 Continue to deepen and expand valued opportunities for networking, engagement and knowledge exchange across IWA's spectrum of water interests as a vital foundation for attracting and retaining members in all regions of the world.
- 1.2 Empower our global members through digital connectivity, integrating our open access publications with membership platforms, employing translation tools for wider engagement, leveraging social media to amplify voices, and fostering an inclusive association led by its members.
- 1.3 Secure further growth in the number of members we have, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where IWA has historically been under-represented, in water user segments beyond our traditional core membership, and by positioning IWA as the natural global home for water and wastewater utilities, all as a foundation for full representation of the water sector.
- 1.4 Tap into the greater potential that Governing Members have to offer, putting in place a framework to actively support the growth of this representation and build more impactful participation and engagement.
- 1.5 Further build an offering to young water professionals especially in terms of networking, advancing opportunities for them to contribute to the growth of IWA's network, and sustaining participation that places IWA as the go-to destination for career recognition and development.
- 1.6 Advance our actions on diversity, equity and inclusion, including with respect to representation and participation (especially in terms of gender and geography), particularly in leadership positions.

Elevating Water Wisdom

Leading the Global Charge for Sustainability

- 2.1 Advance our global member-led contribution as a trusted source made through our spectrum of publication types, our knowledge repository, and communications, capitalising further on the opportunities presented by Open Access, all to inform on water-related insights and issues of concern.
- 2.2 Through knowledge creation and sharing, be an authoritative reference point on the water dimensions of climate change adaptation and mitigation, especially for water utilities and urban administrations with respect to resilience and water security.
- 2.3 Further establish ourselves as a definitive global authority on comprehensive water supply and sanitation, encompassing policy reform, institutional arrangements, regulations and emerging decentralised service models, that enhance the performance of utility operations.
- 2.4 Advance knowledge and understanding of the water sector's involvement in the emerging circular economy, focusing on water reuse, energy, and material resources, and wider connections as food and biodiversity, while highlighting the sector's beneficial contributions.
- 2.5 Continue to solidify our position as a leading authority and global reference on the emergence, influence, and impact of digitalisation in the water sector worldwide, as well as its transformative effects on the industry.

Empowering Solutions

Tailored Content for the Global Water Sector

3.1 Proactively involve IWA members and sector leaders in the curation of a diverse range of professional content and programmes, especially by the continued empowerment of Specialist Groups, while leveraging digital options to enhance participation and content delivery, particularly from underrepresented regions, in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

3.2 Deliver and enhance the opportunities for IWA members and wider water professionals to publish and to share insights and information, especially through our leading formal publishing routes.

3.3 Deliver content and outputs that are highly relevant to local contexts, especially in low- and middle-income countries and in remote and impoverished settings, presenting options and innovative solutions formulated through the combined input of members from multiple geographies.

3.4 Use our member-led activity as a platform to broaden IWA's scope, drawing in additional sectors with interests in or impacts from water, facilitating engagement with IWA's authoritative resources, supporting collaboration and partnerships, and also increasing the potential for IWA membership.

Global Collaboration

for Water Innovation and Leadership Development

4.1 Foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders from within and beyond the water sector, including NGOs, regional associations and governmental bodies, to drive innovation and change, and the governance needed to support this, with a special focus on innovation developed by or applied in low-and-middle income countries.

4.2 Provide a platform for practitioners to share experiences in the application of new technologies and services, encouraging them to adapt and embrace change while accelerating the adoption of innovation in service delivery.

4.3 Expand IWA's reach to include sectors typically outside its core focus, but influenced or impacted by water, enabling greater access to IWA's authoritative resources as a foundation for growing the membership proposition for segments beyond IWA's traditional core.

4.4 Recognise the pivotal role of youth in the development and adoption of innovation, providing a space for young professionals to exchange and promote disruptive ideas, and to advance change at a local level.

Navigating the World's Water Challenges

Leading Advocacy and Collaboration

5.1 Leverage the opportunity presented by our Congresses up to 2030 for IWA to act as an open platform to help advance options to achieve change at scale, especially on sanitation and as a space for partnerships to be established and progressed.

5.2 Advance a holistic agenda to drive progress on the SDGs, especially SDG6 and its focus on water supply and sanitation, spanning sustainability, the need for catchment-level cooperation, and water's role in equity, targeting action and dissemination in local contexts by members and wider stakeholders.

5.3 Connect with the climate agenda through water's growing relevance and offer practical opportunities for climate action through our strategic programmes.

5.4 Capitalise on our growing relevance for low- and middle-income countries to extend our influence in shaping the global water agenda beyond 2030, especially by advancing the potential for Governing Members to empower our network.



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OPERATIONALISING THIS STRATEGY

To advance IWA as an association that works for its members, and to better achieve our vision and mission, IWA will continue to make member engagement central to all our activities.

To deliver on this and the wider implementation of the objectives and goals set out in this Strategic Plan, an operational plan will be developed.

We will work to strengthen the value and appeal of our membership offering. Expanded opportunities for engagement will enhance that offering to existing and potential members.

This plan will set out the activities for the implementation, the involvement of key groups and segments needed to advance the plan, the resourcing required, and the respective timelines for these activities. It will draw on the energies and expertise across our network, especially Governing Members, Specialist Groups, and Young Water Professionals. It will provide a practical reference point on the realisation of the plan. This plan will be complemented by a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation. The operational plan will also advance actions to diversify our income sources, creating a more robust organisation able to best deliver on the Strategic Plan over time.

The operational plan will capitalise on digital opportunities. Members now expect digital content, virtual events, and online networking opportunities, underscoring an essential need to evolve and align with the demands of the digital age. Members, particularly the younger demographic, desire highly personalized services tailored to individual needs. With the proliferation of alternatives such as online communities, courses, and content providers, IWA is now competing for member attention, engagement, and spending. Meanwhile, digital options will be key to serving our increasingly diverse membership.

These operational directions will be powered by the smart use of data and metrics. Collecting, tracking and analysing membership data will allow us to better identify membership segments and tailor value propositions for a more personalised membership experience. It will also help determine the best retention strategies and customer service culture. Through the operational plan, putting the objectives and goals of the Strategic Plan into action, IWA will further build its position as the natural home for globally-connected water sector professionals, shaping action on the many pressing water needs around the world.

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International Water Association
1.04 & 1.05 Export Building | Republic
1 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BA, United Kingdom
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www.iwa-network.org

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