

Summary of Roundtable

On 1 December Baltic Development Forum together with SIWI Swedish Water House and Race for the Baltic organized a round table with the title “Identifying the wins, addressing the barriers, and navigating the concept jungle – The why and how of corporate water stewardship”.

Participating were representatives of a number of organisations providing tools and certification for water stewardship. CEO Water Mandate presented their Water Toolbox, The Water Footprint Network explained their Water Footprint Assessment methodology, World Business Council for Sustainable Development shared their Global Water Tool, European Water Stewardship explained their European Water Stewardship Standard, and WWF outlined their Water Risk Filter.

Two companies – UPM and Choice Hotels - shared their experiences of working in practice with water stewardship.

The round table engaged the 23 participants from a diverse range of sectors in discussion on drivers for water stewardship, as well as the challenges connected to navigating existing tools and implementing them.

The reflection was made that although there are several of tools available for water stewardship, they are not competitors but rather different pieces of the puzzle. Which methodology a company chooses to use depends on their specific needs. The tools are also increasingly harmonizing their approaches and communication, and several are using the same definitions and datasets.

Some of the main points brought up in the discussion:

Drivers and benefits

- A key driver for companies to use water stewardship tools is the desire to identify and address potential risks – physical, financial as well as reputational - connected to their water use.
- Investors are increasingly interested in information on companies’ water performance. This can be an additional incitement for water stewardship moving forward.
- By working with tools and concepts for water stewardship, companies are provided with a platform to engage and collaborate with a new set of actors (NGOs, experts etc). It can also be useful for communication with the general public and with media.

Challenges connected to implementation

- Internal capacity and staff resources was cited as one of the biggest challenges to overcome in order to be able to implement a water stewardship tool.
- Getting an overview of the water performance in the supply chain is much more complicated than acquiring knowledge on the water use in direct operations. The tools can help with this, but several companies reported that it can be difficult to gain access to the necessary data from suppliers.
- The added value of implementing a specific tool on water stewardship has to be weighed against other environmental issues which a company also have to monitor. UPM had come to the conclusion that for them it made the most sense to address water issues within the framework of their existing environmental management systems.

Design of existing tools

- Some companies using the tools are expressing concerns about whether the data they are providing the tools with is kept safe. The tool developers are addressing this by making sure data is safeguarded. However, some of the front-runners among the users are starting to share data amongst themselves in order to compare results and improve.
- The existing tools are mainly used by large corporations. There may be a lack of tools that are applicable to SMEs and adapted to local conditions.
- Certifications may hinder development over time as there is a tendency to “settle down” after the certification has been awarded. It is also important to manage communication on certification in such a way that suspicions of greenwash are avoided.