

China's Ten Point Water Plan

Mainstream and Organic

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Water has become a precious commodity for developed and developing countries alike. The draughts occurring in California in 2014 and in China in 2010 affecting nearly all plants (especially wheat) growing regions are serious problems on the one hand and the water pollution to natural water resources is a deadly issue on the other hand. These issues certainly call for effective measures from governments to deal with the fresh water problem. Recently, I came across a Chinese federal government notice (dated 4-2-2015) to local governments and directs departments reporting to the Chinese central government, a one sentence directive: We deliver the "Water Pollution Prevention and Action Plan" to you, please seriously implement the measures. What a simple and weighty executive order that will not only have impact to the livelihood of 1.3 billion Chinese people, but will also raise the welfare of the world. We certainly wish this mandate, with milestones set on 2016-2018, 2020 and 2030, will be successfully carried out for mankind's sake. I feel that it is worthy of our time to review China's Ten Point Water Plan and cheer the Chinese on.

Chinese government documents tend to be concise, in contrast, for example, to the 20,000 pages (11,588,500 words) Obama care. The lack of details in China's water plan might signify an inadequately thought-out plan which could allow loopholes to fail the implementation. However, if a plan was developed on a sound and broad basis, it might allow innovation and ingenuity to take place at the implementation level. Judging on the past achievements in economic development by the Chinese central and local governments (despite of corruptions), China's water plan may get effectively implemented in the usual manner that local governments are expected to work in a competitive mood to show measurable performance. Since China's water plan is such an important program of great interest to the entire world, this column shall present in the following a summary and a condensed description and commentary of the Ten Point Water Plan. For more details, special mandarin terms and legal interpretations, the readers are referred to the original Chinese language document available from the Chinese State Council or through online search.

Priority conservation, physical balance, systemic management and balanced control with safety, cleanliness and health are the four principles and three directives behind China's Ten Point Water Plan. Goals on quantitative measurable improvements of water environment and pollution reduction are set to be achieved by 2020 and 2030 focusing on China's seven major river-lake regions with quality level III as the yardstick mandating 75% regional water and 95% urban city drinking water to have quality better than level III, which is presumably a global industrial standard. The policies and directives are categorized under ten points as follows:

1. Pollution Control: By the end of 2016, China will outlaw all pollutions in over ten major manufacturing industries; by 2020, will establish city-urban water pollution and recycle control with waste water treatment reaching 85-95% range, agricultural and rural water pollution prevention through fertilization control, and water pollution regulations on ports by 2018 and in-land ports by 2021.
2. Industry Conversion and Upgrade: removing outdated businesses and issuing permits for pollution control, by 2020, completed all city-urban-rural water environment assessment; implementing water based space planning and promoting recycle, reclaim and closed cycle water usage. Apparently, China is coupling the water plan with the industry transformation and upgrade program to sustain China's economic growth, a smart move. Here more details perhaps will be forthcoming.
3. Conservation: Control total water usage, by 2020, limit to 670 billion cubic meters, raise water usage efficiency as one performance measurement of local governments; by 2020, achieve 30-35% reduction in industrial water usage below 2013 level, and apply scientific protection to water resources.
4. Technology Support: Promote and demo applicable technology, initiate R&D on advanced technology and encourage investment in environment protection industry. One would expect more concrete steps will be defined on points 3 and 4. These areas present opportunities for the U.S. to offer goods and services.
5. Market Driven: Develop reasonable water tax and prices, attract investment into water environment protection businesses and provide incentive plan for energy conservation and water pollution reduction. Presumably, China will welcome foreign investment; foreign investors must follow up China's incentive plans.
6. Legal Measures: Complete needed legislations, increase legal power for pollution control and improve control effectiveness across all departments and municipal governments. Hopefully, this part of plan will take advantage of the anti-corruption and justice system reform programs to safeguard the effectiveness of pollution control laws.
7. Water Environment Management: Strengthen water quality goal management, total water pollution control, and water environment risk management; and implement pollution permit system, completion by 2017. This is an aggressive milestone to be watched.
8. Water Environment Safety Protection: Protect source of drinking water, prevent water pollution at all industry regions, strengthen coastal water environment protection and fix city dirty water problem, by 2017, no sizable floating debris on rivers, by 2020 complete dirty water control and protection of water resources and wet lands. Certainly, more definite description of floating objects and method of monitoring must be defined.
9. Accountability: strengthen local governments' responsibilities and inter-departmental coordination, clarify responsibilities of pollution prevention department and apply rigorous measurements on performance of all governments and departments. This is a common problem in other nations; China has the advantage being able to take some lessons from the U.S. and elsewhere.
10. Encourage Public Participation and Oversight: open pollution and environment protection information to the public, strengthen and train public knowledge for oversight purposes and cultivate all people care attitude and behavior. This is hugely important and a key element for the Chinese society to exercise democracy to hold governments accountable.

I was quite impressed after I managed to summarize this high level China's Ten Point Water Plan. If the set goals and quantitative measures were achieved, China would have made another impressive national development milestone for the Chinese people. For the next fifteen years, there are tremendous opportunities for the U.S. and her global corporations focused on environment protection to participate in China's quest for a better living environment. These opportunities will be not only beneficial to many businesses, exports of goods and services and investment firms but also helpful in stimulating and accelerating the development of the environment industry in the U.S. which in turn will improve the environment of the U.S. The best part, of course, is that China's quest for a better environment would create a win-win collaboration between the U.S. and China, two great nations, cooperating to lead the world to be a better place for mankind. In late 2014, when President Obama visited China, an agreement on Climate change control between China and the U.S. was announced. In 2015, during the state visit of President Xi Jinping of China to President Barack Obama of the U.S., further discussion on climate change and environment protection was on the agenda of their presidential meeting. The high level attention and energy spent between the United States and China on clean environment and pollution control is certainly more preferable and worthwhile than time and energy spent on arms development. As global citizens we all should cheer on the Chinese on this significant ten-point water plan.