Ministry of Water Supply and Drainage & Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition

Cabinet Memorandum

Establishment of a Water Quality Surveillance System in Sri Lanka

1.0 Background

1.1 The most commonly adopted definition for drinking water surveillance is: "the continuous and vigilant public health assessment and review of the safety and acceptability of drinking-water supplies" World Health Organization (WHO, 1976).

1.2 Surveillance is needed to contribute to the protection of public health by promoting improvement of the quality, quantity, accessibility, coverage, affordability and continuity of water supplies (known as service indicators) and is complementary to the quality control function of the drinking-water supplier. World Health Organization (WHO, 2004). Proper surveillance requires the development of Water Safety Plans (WSPs) as a tool.

1.3 It must be emphasized however that drinking-water supply surveillance does not remove or replace the responsibility of the drinking-water supplier. The supplier remains very responsible to ensure that a drinking-water supply is of acceptable quality and that it meets the requirements of the laws.

1.4 The surveillance agency needs to have expertise on supplying drinking-water and water quality. The laws pertaining to the same and have the capacity and authority to carry out a process of review and approval of Water Safety Plans (WSPs). It needs to support the development of WSPs for community-managed drinking-water supplies, household water treatment and storage, and management. The water supply agency needs to also have the capacity and authority to ensure that any transgressions that may occur are appropriately investigated and resolved.

1.5 One of the basic principles of an effective control system is the differentiation of the roles and responsibilities of service providers from those of the surveillance agency. However, it is recognized that at present in Sri Lanka, none of the agencies excluding service providers, has the necessary technical expertise, capacity and legal authority to carry out all of the above mentioned tasks of surveillance. It is therefore necessary that the surveillance will be implemented through a mechanism of appropriate collaboration between the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Water Supply and Drainage (MoWSD) utilizing the services of the National Water Supply & Drainage Board (NWS&DB).

1.6 Specifically, the NWS&DB and MoH will cooperate in the following areas of activity:

- In assessing the overall drinking-water supply situation in the country, through the development of a register of all piped water supply systems, and the periodic review and update of coverage and safety adopting service indicators;

- In the development of WSPs for community-managed drinking-water supplies and household water treatment, storage and management;
• In promoting inter ministerial level the development and implementation of comprehensive policies on catchments protection and proper water management;

• In public health oversight and information support for rural drinking-water supplies, both community based and household based, through development and dissemination of generic WSPs for each main technology (wells, springs, rainwater harvesting systems, reticulated systems etc.);

• In public health oversight of drinking-water supplies, through the adoption of, as appropriate, WSPs prepared by the supplier for each individual scheme; and

• In participation in the investigation of and reporting on the outbreaks of waterborne disease and in instituting remedial action.

1.7 A separate MoU will be prepared to formalize the detailed terms and responsibilities between the NWS&DB and MoH for the above mentioned collaboration.

2.0 The Approach and Layout of the Water Quality Surveillance System

2.1 A WSP, the basic tool for surveillance, should be developed specifically for each individual water supply system, whatever the size and complexity. The responsibility of developing the WSP lies with the water supplier, be it a national board, local authority, Community Based Organization (CBO) or private sector (concessionaire, owner). WSPs will be presented to the duly appointed District Water Quality Surveillance Committee for approval and registration. The District Water Quality Surveillance Committee will audit the WSPs and report to the national level. A schematic layout of the system is presented in the attachment.

3.0 Approval

The approval of the Cabinet of Ministers is sought:

3.1 to introduce and implement Water Quality Surveillance in the country based on the framework developed by NWS&DB in coordination with the Department of Health.

3.2 to direct the NWS&DB to provide the leading role in the implementation of the above proposal

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June, 2009

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3rd June, 2009