

CONSULTATION DRAFT OF THE SAN JOSÉ DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE HYDROPOWER



PREAMBLE

This Declaration seeks to outline an updated set of principles, commitments and recommendations for the sustainable hydropower sector to play its best role in the energy transition as a clean, green, modern and affordable energy source.

Both the [IEA World Energy Outlook 2020](#) and the [IRENA Global Energy Transformation: the REmap Transition Pathway](#) call for a near doubling of hydropower installed capacity by 2050. In other words, around 850GW of new installed capacity is required in the next 20-30 years. Of that, pumped storage would need to nearly double to 325GW.

Our shared task is to advance hydropower's role in a clean energy future in a way that also supports healthy rivers.

This Declaration is adopted by a wide set of stakeholders, including those participating in the World Hydropower Congress in September 2021 and the IRENA Collaborative Framework on Hydropower. It is based on a wide-ranging consultation with participants from governments, the private sector, international financial institutions and civil society organisations. It will be taken to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021.

RECOGNISING THAT:

- 🕒 climate change represents the most pressing existential threat to humanity and should be regarded as an emergency by the energy and water sectors, deserving urgent action and international collaboration.
- 🕒 rivers and water systems around the world, and the communities, biodiversity and ecosystem services they sustain, are vulnerable to climate change.
- 🕒 770 million people still do not have access to clean, affordable and reliable electricity (IEA), and almost one in three people do not have access to safely managed drinking water (UNWater).
- 🕒 as a renewable energy, hydropower plays an essential role in decarbonising the energy system, achieving net-zero carbon targets and helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- 🕒 hydropower is a reliable and affordable solution for increasing access to clean electricity and producing green hydrogen.
- 🕒 investment in new and more sustainable hydropower capacity, as well as modernising and upgrading existing capacity, is part of pragmatic, holistic energy policymaking and is essential for the clean energy transition.
- 🕒 hydropower can complement, integrate and accelerate growth in variable renewables such as solar and wind, and strengthen overall system resilience, through the flexibility and storage services it provides.
- 🕒 hydropower projects that are sited, planned and executed in accordance with recognised international good or best practices in sustainability can have positive wider non-power impacts on local communities, including but not limited to water supply, social investment, economic growth, livelihoods, irrigation and flood and drought protection.
- 🕒 sustainable hydropower is defined and demonstrated by alignment with the internationally recognised levels of good and best practice presented in the [forthcoming] Hydropower Sustainability Standard.
- 🕒 sustainably developed and responsibly operated hydropower projects can make a significant contribution to national and international efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals: in particular SDGs 6 (sustainable water management), 7 (affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all), 8 (sustainable economic growth and jobs), 9 (resilient infrastructure) and 13 (urgent action to address climate change).
- 🕒 in the 21st century, hydropower has benefited from advances in science, technology and, most of all, multi-stakeholder understanding of good sustainability practice, to enhance its efficiency, effectiveness, complementarity with other energy sources and benefits, while reducing its negative impacts. It needs to continue to strive for improvements.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide planning, design, implementation, and operation of sustainable hydropower:

“Sustainable hydropower is a nature-based solution to climate change. From 2021, the only acceptable hydropower is sustainable hydropower and must deliver benefits.”

1 SUSTAINABLE HYDROPOWER DELIVERS ON-GOING BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES, LIVELIHOODS AND THE CLIMATE

- a. All types of river- and water-based infrastructure should deliver net positive benefits to communities and the wider environment to merit their construction and continued operation.
- b. Non-powered dams should be assessed for potential retrofitting with hydropower capacity.
- c. Dams that no longer provide benefits to society, have safety issues that cannot be cost-effectively mitigated, and have disproportionate environmental impacts that cannot be effectively addressed, should be decommissioned.

2 THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE HYDROPOWER IS SUSTAINABLE HYDROPOWER

- a. Today, there is no excuse for unsustainable hydropower development projects to go ahead.
- b. Developers and operators of hydropower should demonstrate their commitment to sustainable hydropower in a way that is transparent, verifiable and clear.
- c. Planning, implementing and operating hydropower should be done in accordance with internationally recognised levels of good and best practice as defined by the [forthcoming] Hydropower Sustainability Standard.
- d. Acknowledging that sustainability is constantly evolving, continuous improvement and further refinement of tools and systems should guide action among the sector. All industry stakeholders should respect, encourage and continue developing strong sustainability performance in collaboration with non-industry stakeholders.

- e. [Language on hydropower in World Heritage Sites and in Protected Areas to be included here upon completion of the work of the Working Group on Hydropower in Protected Areas]

3 SUSTAINABLE HYDROPOWER REQUIRES STAKEHOLDERS TO WORK TOGETHER

- a. While all sustainable hydropower projects are unique and site-specific, experience and expertise is available and accessible around the world. As developers, operators, and stakeholders in sustainable development, we acknowledge the importance of learning from local and international experiences and seeking knowledge and connections from internationally established organisations and sector bodies.
- b. Sustainable hydropower alone will not be sufficient to address the world’s water and energy needs. In planning, developing and modernising hydropower, industry, government and civil society should produce integrated energy systems and seek synergies between renewable energy sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY-MAKERS

In the lead up to United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), governments have an opportunity to work with the energy sector and civil society to accelerate the energy transition, and integrate five accelerators in their economic recovery plans:

1 GATHER INFORMATION ON NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- a. Make collaborative multi-stakeholder efforts to share information about sites where renewable energy could be developed. Governments should take a lead by making potential hydropower sites known and seeking international collaboration to ensure that new developments and enhancements of existing sites are delivered sustainably.

2 INCENTIVISE SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HYDROPOWER SECTOR

- a. Set targets to increase the ambition of renewable energy and climate change targets which support and incorporate sustainable hydropower development.
- b. Build multi-stakeholder support for sustainable hydropower, ensure that individual projects have buy-in from affected communities and encourage multi-stakeholder monitoring and accountability of delivery.
- c. Support sustainable hydropower development through providing appropriate financial support such as tax relief or low-interest loans where needed.
- d. Implement sustainable practices and demonstrate that projects are being delivered in a sustainable manner in line with the [forthcoming] Hydropower Sustainability Standard.
- e. Engage with the hydropower industry to highlight and address a range of challenges including climate, energy, water and conservation concerns.

3 DECIDE WHO WILL PAY FOR THE RELIABILITY OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SYSTEMS

- a. Be clear about who pays for storage and flexibility in renewable energy systems.
- b. Develop pumped storage facilities to increase energy storage capacity and power system flexibility for integrating variable solar and wind, in line with good sustainability practice.
- c. Invest in research and development to improve technologies and practices that improve

generation efficiency, environmental performance and integration with variable renewables and other storage technologies.

- d. Establish hybrid renewable technologies where appropriate, including floating solar PV on hydropower reservoirs.
- e. Ensure a level-playing field for low carbon electricity, to ensure the most efficient outcomes for society. [draw on recommendations from International Forum on Pumped Storage Hydropower]

4 UPGRADE EXISTING ENERGY AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

- a. Modernise existing hydropower plants to improve safety, optimise generation and increase efficiency, build climate resilience, and mitigate environmental impacts.
- b. Enhance dam and reservoir operations for water supply, fish passage, flood mitigation, and grid integration of solar and wind.
- c. Increase funding for modernisation, retrofitting, decommissioning and hydropower storage development.
- d. Improve the measurement, valuation of and compensation for energy flexibility, reliability and long-duration energy storage services such as multi-year ancillary contracts.

5 USE IT OR LOSE IT: ALL DAMS SHOULD BE BENEFICIAL

- a. Retrofit suitable non-powered dams.
- b. Decommission dams that no longer provide benefits to society, have safety issues that cannot be cost-effectively mitigated, and have adverse environmental impacts that cannot be effectively addressed.
- c. Advance effective river restoration through improved mitigation and regulation in line with the forthcoming Hydropower Sustainability Standard.

COMMITMENTS

All organisations and persons with an interest in sustainable hydropower are encouraged to commit to these Principles and Recommendations and make their own individual commitments under the auspices of the San José Declaration.

[to be filled in]



The International Hydropower Association (IHA) is a non-profit organisation that works with a vibrant network of members and partners active in more than 120 countries. Our mission is to advance sustainable hydropower by building and sharing knowledge on its role in renewable energy systems, responsible freshwater management and climate change solutions.