

# World Water Congress: David Brooks Looks Forward to Scotland

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The XVth World Water Congress of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA) will meet in Edinburgh, Scotland, on May 25-29, 2015.

OOSKAnews caught up this week with Dr. David Brooks of Canada's International Institute for Sustainable Development. Brooks is a natural resource economist whose main interests lie in the linkages between environmental protection and the use of minerals, energy and water. He was founding director of the Canadian Office of Energy Conservation from 1973 to 1977, and has subsequently worked with Canadian environmental groups Energy Probe and Friends of the Earth Canada, serving as board president for the latter. Brooks has also been a principal with Marbek Resource Consultants and served on the Board of Directors of Ontario Hydroelectric Corporation. Between 1988 and 2003, he worked with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), where he held the posts of Acting Director of the Program for Environment & Natural Resources Management.

**OOSKAnews:** Could we ask you to describe yourself and your role in the "water family?"



**Brooks:** I started off as a geologist, very much with a scientific background. I received my bachelor's from MIT and my master's from Cal Tech. At a point when I was going back for a doctorate in geology, I suddenly realized in my first year that I was really interested in development issues and not where the rocks are. At that point, I shifted to study economics ... That leaves me with a very unusual background of both social science and physical science, and I've always walked that line in my work. For example, I was the first director of Canada's Office of Energy Conservation. Later, I began to get more and more [into] development issues, and I found that water was, by far, the more proximate problem in the government, and since the late 1980s I've focused almost entirely on water. In the background of all this is David Brooks, the environmentalist ... always looking at conservation, what we now call sustainability alternatives. It's led to a very happy career.

**OOSKAnews:** What single water-related issue keeps you awake at night?

**Brooks:** It is certainly not drinking water or sanitation, which I think is a very, very real problem for those people who are short [of water for these purposes]. ... I've actually written that any government that doesn't provide adequate drinking water ought to be deposed. It is a somewhat extensive problem but not a difficult problem to resolve. What keeps me up is how do we provide

enough food (that is, enough water for the agricultural community) without impinging on the water that the ecosystem needs to keep going. To me, the greatest conflict we have is between agricultural demands for water and ecological demands for water.

**OOSKAnews:** The XVth World Water Congress is coming to Scotland for the first time in May 2015. Its theme is: “Global Water, A Resource for Development: Opportunities, Challenges and Constraints.” You’ve spoken to challenges and constraints; where are the opportunities going to come from?

**Brooks:** The real opportunities come from the “heads,” the people working on the water problem. We need water innovation. I think for many years we have been treating water as we did energy about 30 years ago -- thinking that we can just build more dams, more dykes, more channels and resolve the problem. It has got to be a more imaginative solution. In particular, we have to think about water management from the demand side. It is going to take a lot of innovation and many more links with the people who are using the water. If you are talking about demand, you are, in effect, talking about every consumer of water. It is much easier to talk about supply because there are relatively few suppliers.

**OOSKAnews:** Part of that has to be educating the consumer and driving water further up the global awareness index. Whereas fifteen years ago, climate change wasn’t making the front pages of the newspaper and now it can, water has yet to climb further up that awareness curve. What should the water family be doing better to societal and media awareness of water challenges?

**Brooks:** There are a lot of non-governmental organizations in the world, and more interaction with NGOs would be very helpful. The second thing is to encourage governments to take demand management very seriously, and there are two sub-sets of that. One is we have to deal with pricing ... I am aware that the pricing of water is very sensitive in many countries. It is less and less so in the developed world, but in the developing world, particularly in areas like the Middle East, the notion of pricing the water and in particular pricing agricultural water is very, very sensitive. It has to be done gradually; it probably doesn’t mean getting the true value of water in the pricing (that is probably further than we can go), but at least the [cost of] supplying the water has got to be reflected in the price. The other end of this is not nearly so hard but it is just what you said: educating the public, saying “there are better ways to go, this is going to cost us a huge amount, but this is really a cheaper way to go.” That will take time, but it means taking and funding a governmental group with the demand and management mandate that they have got to get people thinking about water.

**OOSKAnews:** Scotland has attracted the World Water Congress for the first time partly because of its Hydro Nation initiative, and Scotland very much looks forward to welcoming the global water community here. What are your greatest hopes for this World Water Congress?

**Brooks:** I’ve been to Scotland a couple of times and I happen to have relatives in Edinburgh .... There are an awful lot of interesting areas. When I get to a place like the Hebrides, I am always looking at what their water system is. I can usually figure out pretty quickly where they get their electricity but it is much harder to work out where the water is coming from and whether it is a problem and so forth. I’ll be looking forward to that.

I am quite fascinated about what I may be able to learn in Scotland that has some very good but not well-known rain-fed technologies.