Foreword

Managing water resources intelligently requires decision-makers to be able to understand and measure the ultimate economic, social and environmental impacts of decisions about the management of water. This in turn requires sound data based on a conceptual framework to link water resources management to broader societal goals, and analytical systems to define and measure them. Just as GDP, the key indicator of national economic performance, is derived from the system of national economic accounts, so must the indicators of water performance be based on a system of water accounts.

This research book fills an important gap by examining the subject of water accounts in depth and by showing why and how water accounting is vital to decisions that will ensure that water and related resources are managed in a sustainable way. The book explains the role that water accounting can play in strengthening water policy and the water industry, in conflict mitigation and resolution, and in underpinning important economic, socio-political and environmental decisions. As such, it provides an in-depth overview of the state-of-the-art of a field of potentially great significance to water managers.

Consistent with its theme, this book is a truly collaborative project. Contributing authors are drawn from around the globe and from academic, practice and policy backgrounds in both water and financial reporting. They apply a range of theories and research methods to provide a wealth of thought leadership on issues faced at political, theoretical and practical levels, as countries and organizations use alternative water accounting systems to address critical issues.

Importantly, the book’s contributing authors look at how and why particular approaches to water accounting have developed over time. They also examine the role of water accounting in transparent reporting that helps to establish property rights, mitigate or resolve water-related conflicts at international and national levels, protect the environment for future generations, demonstrate sound management of water to the advantage of an industry and aid investment decisions. Their exposition of the roles that water accounting can play in resolving regulatory, legal, political and social influences on water accounting policy settings
or the effects of globalization helps in understanding diverse regulatory approaches.

One of the book’s distinctive features is that its chapters are contemporary works written specifically to the theme of the role of water accounting. Strong efforts have been made to balance the chapters across continents and countries, and across academic, practitioner and policy perspectives. Moreover, these chapters have been analysed and debated by the team of authors to ensure that the book provides a coherent and comprehensive overview of issues relevant to the future.

This book, and the conference that led to it, provide new insights into the power of inter-disciplinary collaboration to resolve some of the world’s most important economic, social, environmental, cultural and legal and policy issues. The book shows how high-quality information about water can be provided through water accounting, and has the potential to spawn a path-breaking strand of research that will yield lasting practical legacies.

I commend this book to all readers seeking insights into the role that water accounting can play in improving the management of water and related resources at all levels.

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