

Big business seeks to stop the leaks

By Emily Smith

The European Water Partnership is not alone in trying to encourage 'joined-up' thinking about water policies.

Six CEOs from major international companies today (5 July) launched a Water Mandate to the United Nations Global Compact, a UN campaign aimed at spreading green policies among businesses.

The mandate is not binding and includes no deadlines, instead asking companies to undertake a series of actions "where appropriate, over time".

Actions include investing in new and more efficient technologies, support for market mechanisms to encourage water conservation and water resource education campaigns.

As a first step, CEOs are asked to commit themselves to a 'comprehensive water-use assessment' to find out where they use water and how much is consumed.

The companies involved – Suez, Levi Strauss, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, SABMiller and the Läckeby Water Group – are hoping that other firms among the thousand represented at the Global Compact meeting will follow their example.

"This is the first such call for action from CEOs," said Gavin Power from

the UN Global Compact. "It recognises that water is not just a humanitarian issue, it is increasingly a business issue."

The problem would become more acute, he said, as industries step up their operations in China, India and Africa. The CEO mandate would encourage workers at every stage of production to discuss water conservation, Power explained.

"For example, a company making cotton goods in China would have to talk to the cotton growers and other raw material producers, to make sure everyone is managing water sustainably," he added.

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