

**Dear Madam, Dear Sir,
kind colleagues,**

With all means of warm and friendly welcome, I'm pleased to welcome all delegates to the **Final Conference of the ERA-Net SNOWMAN**. I'm happy to have the opportunity to say a few words before you jump into this notable conference and subsequent actions.

The cause of this conference is healthy soils, which drives the commitment and mission of this meeting. The importance of this topic brings the variety of people and scientific disciplines in this area together in order to advance the framework for further joint research actions on the sustainable management of soil and groundwater under the pressure of soil contamination in Europe.

The envisaged transition from an EU funded ERA-Net project towards a self maintained research funding network marks an important milestone in the integration of soil and groundwater-related research in Europe and even more in transnational based collaboration and co-operation of research funders and managers on this issue. It is a fact, that before 2003 we had only little knowledge or understanding of who the main research funders on soil sciences in Europe have been and of how these funders supposedly have operated their own structure to fund research in their countries. Even though not all challenges to ultimately integrate soil and groundwater-related research in Europe in its best way have been solved now, it is recognisable that the ERA-Nets have contributed to a great extend to the implementation of this vision. In spite of the fact that the EU Member States face many common, cross-border challenges – and “healthy soils” are such a challenge -, Europe is still characterised by a number of national research policies and research agendas, plus the European research Framework Programmes. Contributing to further harmonising these diverse structures of funding and research opportunities across Europe is an important step towards avoiding further research duplication, and I hope you agree with me that facing this challenge should be one of the main outcomes of this conference.

For BMLFUW, ERA-Net SNOWMAN and their funding initiatives on contaminated soil and groundwater covered an important piece of work in providing clear, evidence-led recommendations to improve existing policy and practice. This is one of the reasons why BMLFUW is participating in this network and why it is still enthusiastic about this instrument and its opportunities. Beside the SNWOMAN ERA-Net, our ministry is participating also in 9 other ERA-Nets, representing the spectrum of competences. Although, financial resources to fund research and development are limited and the ministry has to clearly think about how to best use the resources available to fulfil the obligations imposed by the government. We therefore see a number of benefits in participating in ERA-Net projects, among others to help us to use financial contributions to maximum advantage (keyword: leverage effect), to reduce duplication and overlap and to establish common ground in research, to increase potential for sharing data and common methodologies, and guide researchers into areas of European and international interest and priority.

The research landscape on soil and groundwater issues is small but vital in Austria; for BMLFUW it's understood, that without connecting these national research actions to the European context, it would have not that impact that we expect to properly

develop our policies and practices for sustainable soil and groundwater management in Austria. We are continuously admitting to the idea of a European Research Area (ERA) and do see the need to further harmonise some notable thematic blocks on the European level, where it might be advantageous to respond effectively to the challenges ahead.

At the moment, I see two main public demands:

- a) to ensure that the European research area regarding healthy soils is strengthened, and
- b) to achieve optimised return on public investment for soil & groundwater-related policy development and its implementation.

It would be a shining example of leadership if this conference could endorse and set details for further collaboration between the – new and old - partners within the SNOWMAN network in order to achieve sustained, long-term commitments to joint research activities and initiatives on soil and groundwater management.

I really appreciate your participation and truly hope you have an informative, successful conference in Vienna.

Enjoy this final party of SNOWMAN!