A New Zealand – Korea Institute of Hydrology and Water Resources?

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Abstract

As noted on the New Zealand Hydrological Society web page, since 2006 the Society has developed a strong relationship with the Korean Water Resources Association (KWRA). In February 2007 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Presidents of both societies formalising this link. This has been followed by selected groups of New Zealand and Korean hydrological scientists being funded by the respective societies to attend their annual conferences.

As mentioned by the Korean delegates at the 2013 New Zealand Hydrological Society conference, there is mutual agreement to now further the relationship. This is still under discussion, but one possibility is a formal educational connection through the creation of a stand-alone institute at a New Zealand university campus - part funded by both nations. Combining the key words of both Societies, a tentative title might be Institute of Hydrology and Water Resources.

Such an Institute would offset a mismatch which exists at present in the composition of the two Societies. Academic hydrologists are comparatively rare in New Zealand and scattered about in departments of Geology, Geography, and Civil Engineering. Most hydrology in New Zealand is in fact "done" by Crown Research Institutes and regional councils. This is reflected in the academic contributions to NZ Hydrological Society conferences (academics and students) being typically only about 20%. For KWRA conferences the figure is about 60% and similar to New Zealand geology conferences. This is a reflection of the greater emphasis on university hydrological studies in Korea, particularly in civil engineering. Therefore, a definite advantage to New Zealand of the Institute would be to at last have a recognised and active national tertiary centre of excellence for freshwater studies, moving the academic input in the science more toward the Korean model.

The main advantage of an Institute to both nations would be in the educational field. The Institute would provide an English language base for Korean students to gain higher degrees in hydrology and applied water resources, with memories of their New Zealand experience taken back to Korea. Some of those students will inevitably gain positions of authority and would maintain links they built up during their New Zealand stay. The New Zealand students would gain from interaction with overseas students (not necessarily only Korean) while working on common hydrological topics. The nature of the academic emphasis within the Institute would reflect the needs of both nations and would almost certainly include a strong element of small-catchment hillslope hydrology - a common hydrological feature which drew the two Societies together.

If an Institute in New Zealand was to eventuate it would need to maintain a supportive student environment from the outset. Overseas institutions can sometimes be lonely places and full student mentoring services would need to be available to ensure maximum success rates. Given both mentoring and scientific components in place, an Institute as envisaged would certainly provide a new dimension to the relations between the two Societies.

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