

An aerial photograph of the Lake Sevan basin, showing the dark blue lake surrounded by rugged, brownish-grey mountains and a sandy, light-colored plain. The text is overlaid on the top portion of the image.

# AVAILABLE TOOLS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES OF LAKE SEVAN BASIN AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the efforts made by the state and international organizations, the RA water economy is currently facing a number of problems, particularly related to effective planning of protection and management of Sevan basin, inadequate use of water and fish resources, the ecological problems of Lake Sevan, pollution, etc.

Considering the key and vital role of by Lake Sevan in the contexts of environmental protection and economic development of the RA, the effective and substantive participation of the public in decision-making regarding the protection and management of Lake Sevan can contribute to ensuring more transparent and accountable activities of the state in this regard, strengthening the closer and effective cooperation between the private and public sectors, fulfilling the commitment of informing and involving the potential affected communities, exercising the right of everyone's voice to be heard and making more acceptable decisions for the public.

Due to the circumstances outlined above, the purpose of this study is to present and comprehensively analyze the existing legal opportunities for and effectiveness of public participation in a number of processes of protection and management of Lake Sevan basin and their effectiveness, as well as reveal the existing problems.

Specifically, the following rights provided for by the current RA legislation were studied:

- The right of civic initiative;
- The right of the society to participate in the law-making process; and
- The right of the public to participate in the strategic and environmental impact assessment and expert examination processes of projects related to Lake Sevan.

The applied methods include the study of the legal framework regulating the field, the existing legal mechanisms and their practical application, the study of private cases, as well as interviews with experts in the field, authorized bodies, NGOs, as well as representatives of international organizations and academic institutions. Typically, no comprehensive study on the effectiveness of the toolkit for ensuring public participation in relation to the protection and management of Sevan has been carried out so far.

Therefore, in the framework of this study, in addition to the actual legislative regulations, an attempt was made to present the practical cycles of various legislative mechanisms of public participation, reveal the existing legal and/or practical gaps and problems through the analysis of individual cases.

Based on the results of the study, a number of legislative and technical recommendations towards increasing the effectiveness of public participation tools and the sector were also presented.

In addition to the above, mapping of support programs related to the problems of Lake Sevan by international organizations was also done, presenting the public participation components: the methodologies used in them and presented in the report can be useful guidelines for shaping a more effective and substantive cooperation with the public during public discussions.