

ANNECY DECLARATION

EURO-INBO 2022

20th International Conference on the
Application of EU Water Directives



The members of the Euro-INBO network met in Annecy from 26 to 29 September 2022 for their 20th international conference on the application of EU Water Directives.

The historic drought that struck Europe during the summer of 2022 brings a powerful reminder of the importance of collaborative water management by basin, integrating the new constraints imposed by climate change and associating all stakeholders. It also strongly underlined the challenges of sharing water and the difficulties of conciliating water uses that managers will face in the coming years: continuous access to potable water, agricultural production, energy security, preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, etc.

Participants at the conference confirm their commitment to reaching ambitious European targets, guided by the WFD in their activities over the last two decades.

As part of the **Green Deal** adopted by the European Commission in 2019, European initiatives like the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and Zero Pollution for 2050 can also act as a source of synergy and a driving force for integrated water basin management. They promote the sustainable use of resources, involving a more sober, circular economy, the restoration of biodiversity, and the reduction of pollution, in a context of climate change and energy crisis.

Nevertheless, participants draw attention to the need for integration, application and consistency between the different sectorial policies at basin scale, which is the most appropriate scale for water resources management.

Since **water** is one of the main markers of climate change impacts, it **should be central to strategies for adapting to climate change**. With the adoption of a Sustainable Development Goal on Water in the 2015-2030 United Nations Agenda, **the international community recognizes the importance of water management for humans and nature**, necessarily combined with measures to preserve biodiversity and the associated ecosystems. In this area, the European Union strategy on biodiversity for 2030 is a global, ambitious, long-term plan that aims to **protect nature** and **reverse the trend in the degradation of ecosystems**. This strategy aims at setting European biodiversity on the road to recovery **by 2030**. It features specific actions and commitments that constitute the European Union's proposed contribution to forthcoming international negotiations concerning the global framework on biodiversity post-2020. This key component of the Green Deal will also support a green recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governance of basins in the European Union: boost efforts to reach a good ecological status

The **Water Framework Directive (WFD)** aims to ensure the good status of all rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters in the EU by 2027. Yet despite the common benefits of management per basin in Europe and significant efforts in all European basins, only one-third of surface water bodies are likely to reach this target by that date.

Numerous obstacles make it difficult to reach this objective, in particular climate change, which has a strong impact on the functioning of ecosystems; the continuous development of the evaluation system; and increased anthropogenic pressures and their impacts. Efforts will need to be pursued beyond 2027.

The competent authorities underline that the next management cycles and plans are a key occasion to integrate other European, national and basin-level initiatives. River basin management plans (RBMPs) are vital for successfully achieving good status, and a vehicle for successfully implementing sectorial policies.

Making project managers aware of the importance of these services should help mobilize them to carry out action.

After 2027, basin organizations should remain mobilized to involve and incentivize project managers, donors, and users to continue to monitor and evaluate the efforts and results obtained, and to continue to assess choices between users and uses. This mobilization involves regular, constant attention, in particular since climate change is continually moving the goalposts.

All of the above represents a major challenge, since European basin organizations will need to guarantee standardized respect of the different sectorial EU directives (flooding, nitrates, horizon, UWWTD, reuse of treated wastewater, drinking water, etc.)



Participative management: strengthen user engagement and inter-sectorial coordination

Since the adoption of the WFD, significant progress has been made to improve user engagement in terms of water. This development is partly due to the introduction by the WFD of an **obligation for all Member States to encourage active, participative management of water resources at basin scale**.

However, the degree of mobilization and user involvement varies considerably depending on the legal and institutional framework established at national or transboundary level, ranging from a simple guarantee of consultation and access to basic information to the joint conception of river basin management plans (RBMPs) involving a broad range of public and private actors.

There are means to improve the mobilization and involvement of users at each stage of the WFD process for the planning and management of water basins (surveillance, diagnosis, planning and implementation), and to improve the overall implementation of water directives and in particular the 3rd cycle of river basin management plans 2022-2027.

At the scale of territories and basins, the need and demand for involvement by citizen-users is remarkable, with a strong interest in issues related to climate change and its impact on society, the economy and natural resources.

Citizen consultation, which is vital and should if possible take place at several governance levels, should be supplemented by instructive communication to refine knowledge on water basin management and the implementation of action to ensure this management (working groups, pilot projects, awareness-raising), accompanied by expertise in social sciences.

The good state of water is not an achievable target in our basins without involving all users, in particular through basin committees or river, lake and aquifer basin councils – intersectorial spaces for sharing and making decisions. It is therefore necessary to **reinforce coherence between sectorial public policies and between practices observed between different uses**.

In line with IWRM principles, a more global approach integrating all sectors (agriculture, mines, transport, tourism, energy – obviously including hydropower) needs to be put in place, based on tried and tested models.

Concerning the agricultural sector, the progressive greening of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the “Farm to Fork” strategy constitute remarkable progress towards more sustainable water management. Through the diverse successful experiences at basin level and the range of presenters involved, this session showed how better intersectorial coordination can be ensured.

Intersectorial coordination between water, food, energy and ecosystems to reduce compromises and potential conflicts and regulate usages, not just between sectors but beyond borders, should be accentuated to support the decision-making process and strengthen sustainability. Promoting national and transboundary basins as an efficient unit for managing water resources leads to ensuring water security, which is a major issue that impacts global socio-economic development.



In the same vein as the initiative “No water security without ecological security” at the 9th World Water Forum in Dakar, INBO recommends dialogue and mobilization at all stakeholder levels to respond to the quantitative and qualitative tensions surrounding water, aiming at ensuring, at basin level, sustainable access to sufficient water for human health and a healthy ecosystem.

Restoration of river continuity: combining water security, ecological security and energy security

Aquatic ecosystems are subject to numerous pressures. The European Union’s biodiversity strategy for 2030 calls for greater efforts to conform with the Water Framework Directive. It establishes **several targets for aquatic ecosystems**, and also proposes **establishing legally binding rules to reach these targets**. This was one of the reasons behind a **proposal for a European** nature restoration law, published in **June 2022**. It features **restoration obligations** for several types of habitat, including “rivers, lakes, alluvial habitats and coastal wetlands”, and a **list then removal of river barriers required for reaching the targets** to restore the above-mentioned water habitats and the restoration of “at least 25,000 km of rivers [...] into free-flowing rivers by 2030”.

‘EURO-INBO participants started by **underlining the context of multiple crises surrounding these issues**: energy, biodiversity, pollution, and climate change. The restoration of rivers must therefore take this situation into account while considering all of the territory’s usages and regulations.

The participants **identified the need for new technical and scientific tools** (indicators, methodologies, etc.) as well as a **capacity to easily mobilize existing measures, knowledge and data on this subject**.

The importance of **joint construction of actions** between all stakeholders at the different levels (managers, technicians, citizens, elected representatives, scientists, etc.) was also emphasized. In a similar vein, **the benefits of joint funding and funder coordination were pointed out, in order to more efficiently mobilize the financial tools currently available**.

Lastly, the **need to coordinate and simplify regulations** was evoked, with the aim of improving the consideration of objectives related to restoring water courses.



International and transboundary cooperation: globally promote the interest of European Union legislation and tools and the Helsinki Water Convention of 1992 on the protection and use of transboundary water courses and international lakes

In Europe, cooperation for managing transboundary basins is part of a sophisticated legal framework comprising European Union regulations (including the WFD) and those of the [1992 EEC-UN Water Convention](#) (Helsinki Convention).

This session was an opportunity to present the major advances achieved by European transboundary basin organizations, and more widely to exchange on projects and international cooperation initiatives between the European Union and other countries. In particular, the European Union and eight of its Member States recently launched the **“Team Europe Initiative”** with the African Union on managing transboundary waters in Africa, in order to **support the preservation and fair allocation of shared water resources and strengthen regional integration and sustainable development**. Lastly, the [United Nations Water Conference held in March 2023 will be a key milestone](#), including the presentation of progress and shortfalls in attaining sustainable development goal 6.5.2 relating to transboundary water management.

Through the different examples and presentations (Narva River and Lake Peipus, River Sava basin, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube, the Rhone and Lake Geneva, waters shared by Hungary, Albufeira, Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus) **the participants confirmed how important it was for countries to work together to manage shared waters**.

This theme is also at the heart of the [Dakar Action Plan](#) for basins promoted by INBO since March 2022, with the political objective of contributing to the progress and conclusions of the *United Nations Water Conference* scheduled for March 2023, on the global necessity to accelerate implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 *“by basins and for basins”*.

A call for support and for the signature of this action plan was made several times during the conference.