Report of the President of the ICPR to the Plenary Assembly 2026 (Activity report 2025/2026)

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Publisher:

International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)
Kaiserin-Augusta-Anlagen 15, D-56068 Koblenz
P. O. box: 20 02 53, D-56002 Koblenz
Telephone: 0049261942520
E-Mail: sekretariat@iksr.de
www.iksr.org

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Report of the President of the ICPR to the PLEN-CC-26

(Activity report, July 2025 – June 2026)

On 1 January 2026, France took over the presidency of the ICPR from Germany and appointed Lionel Berthet as Miriam Haritz's successor. This activity report covers the period from 5 July 2025 to 16 June 2026, which therefore fell within both the German and French presidencies.

Overview:

1. A clean Rhine – good water quality
2. A well-prepared society – dealing with floods and droughts
3. A living Rhine – ecological continuity and biodiversity
4. A climate-resilient Rhine – adapting to climate change
5. A future-proof commission – public relations

1. A clean Rhine – good water quality

The 'Chemical Monitoring' expert group (EG SMON) has finalised the **Rhine Monitoring Programme Chemistry 2027–2032** and the **Rhine Substance List 2027–2029**, so that these can be published following the 2026 plenary assembly. A new format has been designed for future Rhine water quality reports. This will make chemical monitoring even more transparent in future.

According to the Water Framework Directive, monitoring of the **contamination of biota** is mandatory and allows conclusions to be drawn about water quality. The report on the statistical analysis of measurements of contamination of biota (fish/mussels) by pollutants in the Rhine river basin from 2015 to 2022, compiled by the 'Contamination to Biota' expert group (EG SCON) in collaboration with an external agency, has been published. The results show no contamination, local contamination or only low levels of contamination for most substances. For some substances (such as polybrominated diphenyl ethers and mercury), however, widespread exceedances of the biota environmental quality standards were measured, leading the experts to recommend measures to reduce contamination in future. In the meantime, the EG SCON has presented a concept for the next assessment period.

The 'Emissions' expert group (EG SEMI) is working intensely on the **emissions inventory**, which will serve as input for the 4th River Basin Management Plan for the International River Basin District Rhine. Improvements have already been achieved in this area in the past, and the technical report highlights further progress.

To be able to regularly review the 30% reduction target for **micropollutants** agreed at the 2020 Rhine Ministerial Conference, the ICPR had published a monitoring and assessment system in December 2022. The first interim report, published in December 2025, shows initial positive developments – particularly for wastewater treatment plants. At the same time, further efforts are needed across all emission sectors to achieve the target, and the methodology must be optimised by the time of the next interim report to further increase its reliability.

The temporary 'Industry and Commerce' expert group (EG INDUSTRY) is working on a situation analysis of the **release of micropollutants from industry and commerce** into water bodies in the Rhine river basin. The aim is to identify further measures in this emission sector that will help to achieve the 30% reduction target.

Within the ICPR 'Water Quality and Substances' working group (WG S), a discussion on **PFAS** was initiated in order to exchange knowledge (e.g. measurement methods, standards, emission sources) and experience in the countries in the Rhine catchment area, and thus contribute to the necessary discussions at EU level and provide advice.

In the **non-target screening** project, in which data exchange plays a key role, Rhineland-Palatinate was welcomed as a new project partner into the consortium. The laboratories' joint international database (containing data from the non-target screening) was extended and the monitoring network expanded. In addition, the necessary steps have been initiated to ensure that, in future, gas chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry (GC-MS) can be used as an additional measurement technology alongside liquid chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry. This will broaden the range of substances that can be identified, as the two methods complement one another. In summary, it can be said that the ICPR has made considerable progress in recent years in the field of non-target screening – which complements traditional chemical monitoring and can detect new substances and metabolites more efficiently – thanks, amongst other things, to EU funding.

At the end of 2025, the ICPR has applied for EU LIFE funding to develop a new, user-friendly and climate-proof **Rhine alarm model** with enhanced functions. The application was evaluated positively, and the grant agreement was signed in May 2026. As part of this project, the ICPR will develop a new, innovative model that will enable the authorities to calculate and track the spread of pollutants in the event of accidental spills.

In cooperation with the German Federal Institute of Hydrology, the ICPR has begun preparatory works for **microplastic monitoring** in the Rhine. Microplastics are a source of pollution that is receiving increasing attention. This pilot study is intended to provide the authorities in the Rhine river basin with first systematic insights into this issue. The next steps will be planned in close coordination with developments at European level.

2. A well-prepared society – dealing with floods and droughts

In the densely populated Rhine river basin, there is a significant risk of flooding, which is likely to increase because of population growth and climate change. The 'Rhine 2040' programme has **set the target of reducing the flood risk by 2040 by at least 15%** compared with 2020, through an optimal combination of measures.

The 'Validation of water level lowering measures' expert group (EG HVAL) has completed its calculations on the effects of **water level lowering measures** (including flood retention areas) and is currently documenting the results. Building on this, the 'Flood Risk Analysis' expert group (EG HIRI) will use the 'FloRiAn' (Flood Risk Analysis) tool to calculate, as part of the first interim review of the 'Rhine 2040' programme, whether the ICPR is on track to achieve the 15% risk reduction target by 2040.

The 'Flood and Low Water' working group (WG H) has continued its work on an **inventory of new potential flood retention areas** which could help to specifically lower water levels just before the flood peak is reached during flood events, thereby contributing to the achievement of the 15% risk reduction target set out in 'Rhine 2040'.

In December 2025, the ICPR has published the report on the update of the **flood hazard and flood risk maps** in the International River Basin District Rhine. The **Rhine Atlas**, which the ICPR has been publishing for over 20 years, also provides the public with a comprehensive overview of floodplain areas along the Rhine. It was updated with new data in June 2026. It offers a comprehensive overview of the flood-prone areas along the Rhine, with links to national and regional map services (for further details).

In December 2025, two synthesis reports drawn up under the leadership of WG H were published on **appropriate behaviour in response to flood warnings** and on **non-technical measures** taken by the states. *Good practice* examples enable the states to learn from one another. These reports also serve as input for the 3rd International Flood Risk Management Plan Rhine, the drafting of which has already begun.

The 'Low Water' expert group (EG LW) is focusing its work on an **inventory of measures for low water and drought management**. The aim is to develop common approaches and systems for assessing low water situations. The results of the 'Socio-Economic Scenarios (SES)' project by the International Commission for the Hydrology of the Rhine Basin (CHR) are of great value in predicting how water availability along the Rhine will develop.

Experience from recent decades, together with new findings on climate change, shows that the risk of drought and low water levels during the summer months is set to increase across the entire Rhine river basin. The ICPR has recognised this at an early stage and is therefore continually expanding its activities in this area.

3. A living Rhine – ecological continuity and biodiversity

The 'Biotope Network' expert group (EG BIOTOP) is conducting a user survey on the **Biotope Atlas** to assess the need for an update to the atlas. The atlas highlights where valuable habitats are located along the Rhine and where there is still potential to expand these habitats. It was originally compiled using satellite imagery, which helped to save money.

The data collected as part of the **Rhine Monitoring Programme Biology** 2024/2025 (covering macrozoobenthos, macrophytes, diatoms, phytoplankton and fish fauna) is currently being evaluated. The analysis of these important bioindicators over several decades provides valuable insights into the ecological status of the Rhine. For the first time in 2024/2025, supplementary **eDNA analyses** were carried out at several monitoring sites. This methodology, which is also used on the Danube, amongst other rivers, complements traditional monitoring and could simplify monitoring in future.

Improving **ecological continuity** is another key element in achieving good ecological status for water bodies.

The states in the Rhine river basin coordinate their measures within the ICPR in order to achieve results in this area. To this end, they have continued to exchange information on progress made in implementing measures to restore ecological continuity in the main course of the Rhine. The fish pass at the Rhinau dam in France has been in operation since 2025. The fish pass at the Marckolsheim dam is scheduled to come into operation this year. With a view restore the ecological connectivity in the Vogelgrun area, France has provided the ICPR with an update on its current plans and will continue to keep the relevant bodies informed. Work to improve continuity in the Gerstheim and Rhinau loops is currently being carried out as part of a Franco-German Interreg project funded by the European Union.

In the Dutch Rhine delta, new measures have been introduced to **reduce fishing pressure**. For example, no-fishing zones of 250 m have been established along the coast and 1,500 m off the Haringvliet. Furthermore, the use of certain types of fishing equipment has been banned. Construction work on the fish migration channel in the barrier dam between the North Sea and lake IJsselmeer is progressing.

The **Atlantic salmon** serves as a flagship species, representing other long-distance migratory fish. Measures to restore ecological continuity are beneficial for the entire flora and fauna. In recent years, the number of returning salmon on their way to the already accessible spawning grounds in the Rhine catchment area has not increased to the extent expected, given the measures implemented and the stocking efforts made. A study commissioned by the ICPR to evaluate the development of salmon populations in the Rhine river basin was published at the end of 2025, accompanied by a policy summary. On the basis of this study and other recent scientific findings, the 'Fish Fauna' expert group (EG FISH) and the 'Ecology' working group (WG B) are currently drawing up a strategic position paper on behalf of the ICPR member states regarding the species' prospects for development in the catchment area and the recommended additional measures.

The **eel population** in the Rhine remains stable, but at a low level. The ICPR has published a technical report on the measures taken by the national states in recent years to protect the European eel in the Rhine catchment area.

4. A climate-resilient Rhine – adapting to climate change

As is the case everywhere in the world, climate change poses a major challenge to the Rhine's ecosystem, one that is best addressed at the catchment level. Several years ago, the International Commission for the Hydrology of the Rhine Basin (CHR) published a study on the diminishing influence of glaciers on the hydrology of the Rhine.

The ICPR builds on this work. In recent years, international experts from the states in the Rhine river basin have, under the auspices of the ICPR, compiled comprehensive new findings on the impacts of climate change (including on river discharge, water temperatures, biodiversity, torrential rain/flash floods, water availability and droughts) and discussed these during a workshop. These new scientific findings help the national states to take targeted measures to adapt to climate change.

As adaptation to climate change has high priority for all states in the Rhine river basin, it was decided at the end of 2025 to allow some more time for the discussion and updating of the climate change adaptation strategy for the Rhine river basin, so that the revised strategy will be available in time for the Ministerial Conference scheduled for the end of 2027 in Luxembourg. As mentioned at the beginning, the ICPR is also continuing its close cooperation with the CHR, including on the development of joint approaches to dealing with low water levels and drought.

5. A future-proof commission – public relations

The annual **information exchange between the NGOs and the president** took place on 14 April 2026. Topics discussed included ecological continuity and micropollutants, amongst others.

On 3 July 2025, the ICPR celebrated its **75th anniversary** in Düsseldorf with invited guests, looking back on the successes of decades of cooperation and looking ahead to current and future challenges.

During the reporting period, there were four **press releases**:

- to mark the 75th anniversary, in combination with the plenary assembly (on 4 July 2025);
- to mark the publication of the technical report on the projected development of water temperatures in the Rhine up to 2100 (on 10 July 2025);
- to mark the first interim report on micropollutants (on 15 December 2025) and
- on the occasion of the appointment of the new president (on 5 January 2026).

During the reference period covered by the activity report, the ICPR secretariat received 8 international **visitor groups** from the following regions: East Asia (3), Caucasus/Central Asia (2), Africa, Europe and South America.

The ICPR – represented by its president, the executive secretary and the scientific assistants of the secretariat, as well as, in some cases, by group chairs – took part in **13 events** with presentations – 8 of which were online and 5 in person – including:

- Participation in a panel discussion on 'Water and Climate Change' at Stockholm Water Week,
- Opening address at the 'Blue Belt Upper Rhine' project meeting in Rastatt (Germany),
- Guest lecture on international river basin management at Colorado State University (online),
- Presentation at the workshop of the International Commission for the Protection of the Odra/Oder on warning and alarm plans, including warning criteria, in Wrocław (Poland),
- Presentation on the projected development of discharge levels at selected gauging stations on the Rhine and its main tributaries up to 2100 at the German-Dutch Flood Conference in Rees (Germany),
- Presentation at the 8th INBO/UNECE meeting of the Global Network of Basins Working on Climate Change Adaptation (online),
- Presentation at a European–South American workshop on ecology and river basin management organised by the University of Huelva (online),
- Speech at the opening of the refurbished Basel wastewater treatment plant (with a fourth treatment stage) in Basel.

Participation in international events and exchanges with other bodies enables new insights to be gained that are of benefit to all members of the ICPR.

On 13 September 2025, the ICPR Secretariat, together with the German Federal Institute of Hydrology (BfG), supported the '**RhineCleanUp**' with an information stand, with a view to promoting this valuable civil society initiative for a clean Rhine.

Alongside conventional public relations work and its website www.iksr.org/en, the ICPR has had a presence on **social media** since the end of 2020 in order to reach a wider audience. It runs a page on **LinkedIn** (International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine), which has more than 1,600 followers.

The ICPR has modernised its corporate identity by introducing a contemporary **new logo**.

Appendix 1: ICPR Technical Reports

The following list contains technical reports that were published during the 2025/2026 session *or are expected to be published immediately after the 2026 plenary assembly (in italics)*.

No.	Title	Languages
302	Simulation of the effects of climate change scenarios on future Rhine water temperature development – update IPCC AR5	EN
304	Evaluation of trends in salmon populations in the Rhine catchment area	DE, FR, NL
305	International Warning and Alarm Plan Rhine (IWAP) – Messages 2024	DE, FR, NL
308	Report of the President of the ICPR to PLEN-CC-25 (Activity Report, December 2024 - July 2025)	DE, FR, NL, EN
309	Current knowledge of possible impacts of climate change on river ecosystems and biodiversity in the Rhine catchment area	DE, FR, NL
310	Progress in the implementation of the Master Plan Migratory Fish Rhine in the years 2018-2023	DE, FR, NL
311	Contamination of biota (fish/mussels) with pollutants in the Rhine catchment area from 2015 to 2023	DE, FR, NL
312	Reducing micropollutants in the Rhine catchment area – first interim report on MICROMIN activities	DE, FR, NL
314	National measures for the European eel in the Rhine catchment area 2017–2022	DE, FR, NL
315	Flood warnings and how affected people should respond in the Rhine catchment area: findings from studies and recommendations	DE, FR, NL
316	Synthesis of national 'non-technical' flood risk management measures in the Rhine catchment area	DE, FR, NL
	Report on the updating of flood hazard and flood risk maps in the International River Basin District Rhine (third cycle of the Floods Directive)	DE, FR, NL, EN
317	*Rhine substances list 2027-2029*	*DE, FR, NL*
318	*Rhine measuring programme Chemistry 2027-2032*	*DE, FR, NL*
319	*Report of the President of the ICPR to the PLEN-CC-26 (Activity Report, July 2025 – June 2026)*	*DE, FR, NL, EN*
320	*International Warning and Alarm Plan Rhine (IWAP) – Messages 2025*	*DE, FR, NL*
321	*Concept for the comparison of measurements of contamination of biota (fish/mussels) by pollutants in the Rhine catchment area during the fourth management cycle (2028–2034) under the WFD*	*DE, FR, NL*