



16th Rhine Ministerial Conference

Communiqué

February 13, 2020, Amsterdam

The Rhine and its Catchment: Sustainably Managed and Climate-resilient

On February 13, 2020, the ministers responsible for the protection of the Rhine and the representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU met in Amsterdam. The purpose of the conference was to take stock of the collaboration to date to protect the Rhine, its tributaries and the entire catchment area, and to lay down guidelines for future collaboration.

The following took part in the conference:

For Germany, Ms. Svenja SCHULZE, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety;

For France, Ms. Simone SAILLANT, Deputy Director, Water and Biodiversity, representing Ms. Elisabeth BORNE, Minister for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition;

For Liechtenstein, Ms. Dominique HASLER, Minister of Home Affairs, Education and Environment;

For Luxembourg, Ms. Carole DIESCHBOURG, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development;

For the Netherlands, Ms. Cora VAN NIEUWENHUIZEN WIJBENGA, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management;

For Austria, Mr. Günter LIEBEL, Director General, Water Management, representing Ms. Elisabeth KÖSTINGER, Federal Minister for Agriculture, Regions and Tourism;

For Switzerland, Ms. Franziska SCHWARZ, Vice Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, representing Federal Councillor Ms. Simonetta SOMMARUGA, Head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications;

For Wallonia, Ms. Anne TRENTELS, qualified attaché, representing Ms. Céline TELLIER, Minister of the Environment, Nature, Animal Welfare and Rural Renewal;

For the European Union, Mr. Daniel CALLEJA CRESPO, Director-General for Environment, representing Mr. Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries;

For the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, Ms. Veronica MANFREDI, President of the Commission.

Observing were the following

Representatives of intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations

Preamble

1. Today's ministerial conference builds on the 15th Rhine Ministerial Conference of 2013 in Basel, with new, pioneering decisions.
2. The contracting parties of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) look back on almost 70 years of steadily growing, trusting and fruitful cooperation in water protection. For 20 years they have also been working successfully with all nations in the Rhine catchment area as part of the Coordination Committee Rhine, to implement the EU guidelines with regard to bodies of water. The successes achieved so far were recognised in Vienna in 2013 with the first European Riverprize, and in 2014 in Canberra with the Thiess International Riverprize.
3. The "Rhine 2020" programme set out in 2001, ends in 2020. The ICPR took stock of both the goals achieved, and those not yet fully achieved.
4. It is intended that the successful cooperation, based on solidarity in the Rhine catchment area, will continue for the next 20 years. This will largely happen by means of a new programme, "Rhine 2040", which entails ambitious goals.
5. Against the backdrop of global environmental problems, there are important challenges, including the increasingly clear effects of climate change on water bodies and their uses. This is particularly true in light of the SDGs of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and similar international efforts, such as the European Green Deal. These effects must be better taken into account in water management in the future, on the basis of the procedures agreed in the ICPR and incorporating the latest knowledge. The new "Rhine 2040" programme aims to manage the Rhine and its catchment area sustainably and to develop it to be climate-resilient.
6. The new "Rhine 2040" programme also takes into consideration political requirements and objectives at the level of the European Union and the nations in the catchment area. The programme is reviewed regularly and - if necessary - further developed and/or tightened.
7. It also contributes to the implementation of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 6 (ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all).

Cooperation in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine

8. **The ministers and representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU state** that
 - a. the principle of solidarity between nations, states and regions is an important basis for good and trusting cooperation;
 - b. the ICPR approaches new topics in an innovative way, thereby advancing the protection of water and ecosystems not only in the Rhine catchment area, but also across Europe;
 - c. in many ways, the ICPR is a role model for cross-border cooperation and for other international river basins, in Europe and beyond.

"Rhine 2020" Assessment

The "Rhine 2020" assessment demonstrates which goals have been achieved, where the future challenges lie and where even greater efforts are required.

9. **The ministers and the representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU are pleased to note the progress made due to the "Rhine 2020" programme.**
10. **In particular they note with satisfaction that**
 - a. since the last Rhine Ministerial Conference in 2013, important progress has been made in restoring the ecological passability of the Rhine and its catchment area with the
 - partial opening of the Haringvliet locks in 2018, in the estuary area of the Rhine;
 - the commissioning of two new large Upper Rhine fishways in Strasbourg in 2016 and Gerstheim in 2019, and improvements to previously built fishways;
 - the development of two technically and fish-ecologically feasible solutions for the establishment of fish passability at the Vogelgrün dam, as well as proposed solutions for fishways in Rhinau and Marckolsheim so that the fish can reach the Old Rhine (Restrhein) and Basel;
 - the commissioning of a new fishway and fish lift in Eglisau-Glattfelden on the Upper Rhine in 2017;
 - the redesign of a further 120 migratory obstacles in the waters covered by the programme Master Plan Migratory Fish (almost 600 since 2000), through which more than 28% of the potential and valuable salmon habitats in the Rhine catchment area are accessible once more. As a result, other animal and plant species can also spread out freely again. This increases the overall biodiversity;
 - b. since 2000, important progress in the restoration of the biotope network on the Rhine has been made by the
 - reactivation of 140 km² of floodplains;
 - increase in the structural diversity of riverbanks to almost 230 km;
 - reconnection of almost 160 oxbow lakes and lateral tributaries to the Rhine with its river dynamics;
 - c. since 2000, numerous successes in terms of water quality have been achieved, particularly in the further reduction of nitrogen, phosphorus and heavy metals through new, optimised and modernised municipal and industrial water treatment plants;
 - d. in particular through measures to prevent flooding by 2020, it was possible to reduce flood risks by 25 % in comparison to 1995.

11. **The ministers and representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU state** that
- a. the aim of the programme, that salmon return to the Old Rhine (Restrhein) and Basel by 2020 – as has been decided several times at Rhine Minister level – has not yet been achieved;
 - b. the progress specified in the assessment, in restoring the passability of the Rhine for migratory fish up to the upper reaches and its tributaries, especially the Moselle as an international tributary, is not sufficient. Ecological passability for migratory fish upstream from Gerstheim to Basel is lacking not only in the main stream of the Rhine, but also in tributaries, for example in the Moselle above the Koblenz barrage to the mouth of the Sauer;
 - c. as a result, other passability measures already implemented – in the context of solidarity in the Rhine catchment area – downstream and upstream, cannot develop to full effect;
 - d. substance entry via point sources and diffuse entry paths, including numerous micropollutants such as pharmaceuticals and plant protection products, continue to pose a problem for water quality and countermeasures, particularly with regard to diffuse entry paths, must be taken;
 - e. further measures for flood risk mitigation, flood retention and their closer linkage with the ecological enhancement of the water bodies are necessary;
 - f. the increasingly clear effects of climate change on, among other things, the runoff regime (high and low water) and water temperature, must in the future be given greater attention in all ICPR focal areas, as these effects can have a negative impact on water quality and ecosystems, as well as on the usage functions of the Rhine;
 - g. the Rhine and its tributaries play an important role in the conservation and improvement of nature and biodiversity in the catchment area and the measures implemented or planned in all focal areas of the ICPR contribute to the achievement of national, European and international biodiversity goals.

"Rhine 2040" programme

12. **The ministers and the representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU, adopt the "Rhine 2040" programme**, which will serve as the basis of work for the ICPR for the next 20 years and contains ambitious goals to be achieved together for the further improvement of the state of the Rhine and its catchment area.
13. **They consider necessary measures in the following areas:**
- a. The ecological passability of the Rhine should be restored for migratory fish from the mouth to the Rhine Falls (including thresholds in the Rhine loops) and in its large tributaries, in particular the Moselle (to the mouth of the Sauer) as an international tributary, including the programme waters Master Plan Migratory Fish.

In order to continue efforts to restore ecological passability, the fishway near Rhinau will be operational in 2024. The fishway at Marckolsheim will be operational in 2026. The fishway for the complex Vogelgrün area will be

operational as soon as possible so that the migratory fish can reach the Old Rhine (Restrhein) and Basel again. France will specify the necessary technical and financial measures in anticipation of this.

The restoration of fish passability in the High Rhine to the Rhine Falls and in the Swiss programme waters (Aare, Reuss, Limmat) will be implemented by 2030.

By 2030, a further 300 fish migration obstacles in the catchment area will be made passable again. Through these measures, a total of around 60% of the potential and valuable migratory fish habitats can be connected to the Rhine again.

- b. Ecological passability for migratory fish is realised in the Upper Rhine loops as follows:
- Loop Gerstheim, the lower threshold (Rappenkopf) by 2023 at the latest,
 - Loop Rhinau, the two lower thresholds (Salmengrien and Hausgrund) by 2023 at the latest; if necessary, these two thresholds will be made passable as part of the planned larger Rhinau Taubergießen renaturation project, then by 2025 at the latest,
 - With regard to further thresholds in the Gerstheim and Marckolsheim loops, bilateral coordination between Germany and France will continue.

The French "Rhin Vivant" programme is expressly welcomed as an additional project to increase biodiversity on the Upper Rhine.

- c. The downstream fish migration (fish descent) at hydropower plants in the Rhine and in its large tributaries, including the programme waters of the Master Plan Migratory Fish, must thus ensure that healthy fish populations are maintained in the long term. The nations will assess the constructional or operational measures available to reduce fish mortality during descent in order to identify and implement the most suitable measures for small, medium and large hydropower plants wherever possible. The ICPR will develop recommendations for fish protection and fish descent by 2024. The exchange of research and knowledge continues.
- d. The following goals are agreed for the further ecological improvement and restoration of a biotope network on the Rhine with its water-dependent, current-based habitats:
- Expansion of floodplains by 200 km²;
 - Reconnection of 100 oxbow lakes;
 - Increased structural diversity on 400 km of banks.
- e. Micropollutants pose an increasing challenge for aquatic ecosystems and for drinking water production. The ICPR recommendations published in 2019 for reducing the entry of micropollutants from urban drainage, industry and commerce and agriculture, set out which measures should be taken - from those at the source to those regarding improved wastewater treatment. The influx of micropollutants into the waters from the areas of municipal waste water collection and treatment systems, agriculture, industry and commerce are to be reduced by at least 30% in total by 2040 in comparison to the period 2016-2018 - consistent with a longer-term ambition to further decrease pollution throughout the Rhine catchment area. In order to be able to numerically check the reduction in influx at regular intervals and, if necessary,

to increase the reduction target, the ICPR is tasked with developing a joint evaluation system for the reduction across the three areas by 2021.

- f. The flood risks are to be reduced by at least 15% by 2040 in comparison to 2020, through an optimal combination of measures. All parties assume their responsibilities here. If possible, the measures should be combined with natural solutions and/or with ecological enhancement.
- g. The advancing climate change, especially the increasing low water situations and periods and their effects pose a great challenge for future water management and the uses of the bodies of water in the Rhine catchment area. The ICPR is tasked with updating its climate change adaptation strategy by 2025, in coordination with current and future national climate adaptation strategies. It will also take into account the results of the current and next adaptation strategy in the future management cycles of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Flood Risk Management Directive (FRMD).
- h. In order to be better prepared for low water periods, common evaluation criteria and approaches are being developed. A common approach is sought for dealing with the effects of low water events across the Rhine catchment area.

14. The ministers and representative of the European Commission, on behalf of the EU state

- a. that the implementation of the new "Rhine 2040" programme in the ICPR must be coordinated and that the assessments regarding the implementation must be drawn up every 6 years or potentially more frequently according to the circumstances (finally in 2039). The programme will be adapted if necessary;
- b. their express willingness to stand in solidarity in supporting the ICPR in the implementation of the Rhine 2040 programme with the necessary financial resources and expertise.