



Press release

ICPR to start updating climate change adaptation strategy in autumn 2022 – third extreme low water in 20 years underlines urgency

For the third time since 2003 and 2018, the Rhine and many water bodies in its catchment area are affected by a pronounced low water level. The current event is comparable to the low water of four years ago. At the gauges in Duisburg-Ruhrort (Germany) and Lobith (Netherlands), the water levels even fell below those of 2018.

Low water, just like flooding, is initially a natural phenomenon. However, if it takes on extreme proportions and lasts for a long time, it can negatively affect the ecology, significantly disrupt navigation, lead to restricted water availability for agriculture and industry, and affect the drinking water supply in the Rhine delta. Negative ecological effects occur, for example, in connection with high water temperatures, which cause stress for cold-loving fish species, or due to rivers and streams in the catchment area running dry.

Climate change increases the likelihood of more frequent and more severe low-water events in the future. [It is also to be feared that the share of meltwater from snow and glaciers, which stabilises the discharge of the Rhine during low water, will decrease.](#) This makes it even more important to restore near-natural water structures on the Rhine and in its catchment area, and to adapt to climate change.

Near-natural water bodies are more resistant to the negative effects of low water. In near-natural riparian areas with shady vegetation and cooler side waters, fish and other organisms find important refuges during low water and heat stress. From 2000 to 2020, the states in the Rhine river basin have restored about 140 km² of floodplains and reconnected more than 150 oxbow lakes to the Rhine. By 2040, another 200 km² of floodplains are to be restored and 100 oxbow lakes reconnected to the Rhine, according to the ["Rhine 2040" programme](#) adopted at the Conference of Rhine Ministers in Amsterdam in February 2020. The [biotope atlas](#) published in 2022 shows where there are existing alluvial forests or potentials for renaturation measures.

With the "Rhine 2040" programme, the states in the Rhine catchment have also decided to develop joint solutions for low water and to update the climate change adaptation strategy. For this purpose, two expert groups have already been established in the summer of 2022, which will deal with the projections for discharges and water temperatures from autumn onwards. The already existing expert group on low water will consider the role of water demand and availability.

Together with actors from different sectors, measures are to be discussed. The ICPR also plans to cooperate closely with the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR) and the International Commission for the Hydrology of the Rhine Basin (ICHR).

When adapting to climate change, it is important to reconcile the various usage demands on the Rhine with the ecological requirements.

Further information on low water in the ICPR:

The ICPR has launched an international [low water monitoring system](#) in 2019. A scale with six colours helps to classify the current discharges and water levels. The same scale is also used in the catchment areas of Moselle and Meuse.

The expert group "Low Water" published an [inventory of low water on the Rhine](#) in 2018 and an [evaluation of the record low water in 2018](#) in 2020. It will now also evaluate the current low water.

Contact for queries

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Background information on the ICPR

In the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR), Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the European Union have been working together for 70 years on the basis of a convention under international law to reconcile the diverse uses and protection of water bodies. With a view to implementing European directives, the cross-border cooperation was extended to Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy and the Belgian region Wallonia.

At present, Veronica Manfredi of the European Commission holds the ICPR presidency. She and the different ICPR fora are supported by the international staff of the permanent secretariat in Koblenz (Germany).

See also www.iksr.org/en/ and <https://twitter.com/ICPRrhine>.