



Press release

How is the Rhine today? - ICPR publishes technical reports on the ecology and water quality of the Rhine

The Rhine and its tributaries are doing much better. Based on the successes achieved, further progress is needed to reach the good status. This is shown by the reports on the ecology and water quality of the Rhine adopted at the plenary session of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) on 1 and 2 July 2021. The findings also flow into the International River Basin Management Plan Rhine 2022-2027 according to the EU Water Framework Directive. Interested parties can submit comments on the draft plan until mid-October.



Photo: Stefan Schulte-Kellinghaus

As a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, the annual ICPR plenary meeting on 1 and 2 July 2021 was held for the second year running as a video conference with simultaneous interpretation in German, French and Dutch. ICPR President Veronica Manfredi and Liz van Duin, representative of the host country Netherlands, welcomed about 60 participants.

Technical reports adopted at online plenary session

By the end of 2020, several biological technical reports, the Rhine Atlas and the International Flood Risk Management Plan Rhine had already been published. The plenary assembly now adopted four further technical reports, which give a comprehensive insight into the ecological resp. chemical status of the Rhine on the basis of various indicators. They are produced regularly and are leading the way for many ICPR products:

- ["Fish in the Rhine 2018/2019"](#)
- ["Synthesis Report on the Rhine Monitoring Programme Biology 2018/2019"](#)
- ["Emission inventory 2016"](#)

- "[Rhine Water Quality Report 2017-2018](#)"
- Synoptical table: <https://www.iksr.org/en/public-relations/documents/archive/technical-reports/synoptical-table>

Further efforts needed on the basis of the successes achieved

All water bodies in the Rhine catchment are to achieve the good ecological and chemical status or good ecological potential as soon as possible. Furthermore, the states want to create a sustainably managed Rhine catchment that is resilient to the impacts of climate change by 2040. This is what the ambitious "Rhine 2040" programme adopted by the Conference of Rhine Ministers in 2020 envisages.

The new technical reports show that much progress has already been made towards this goal, but that further efforts are also needed. The most important findings are summarised briefly:

- Thanks to the improved water quality, the implementation of measures to restore river continuity and the renaturation measures, the biotic communities of the Rhine have recovered significantly since 1990.
- The reduction of nutrient pollution in the Rhine has led to more natural communities of both the diatoms living on the river bottom and the suspended algae (phytoplankton). The fauna and flora also benefit from this.
- Almost all typical fish species are native to the Rhine again today, including migratory fish such as the salmon. In many places, however, species with low habitat requirements or invasive species dominate. More valuable habitats with a greater structural diversity in the riparian area must be created and further obstacles to fish migration removed.
- Increasing extreme events as a consequence of climate change (e.g. low water levels and high water temperatures) affect the fauna and flora in the Rhine. Further studies are needed to better understand the impacts of global environmental change and their complex interrelationships.
- Inputs of nutrients and heavy metals have continued to decrease since the last survey - primarily due to reductions in point source inputs.
- Micropollutants, e. g. from X-ray contrast media and pesticides, remain a challenge. In the future, they can be reduced through measures above all at the source, up to and including the expansion of further wastewater treatment plants with the 4th treatment stage (as has already been done in some places in Switzerland, Baden-Württemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia).

River Basin Management Plan Rhine: Comments still possible until 15 October

These and other findings from the expert reports have also been included in the draft of the Internationally Coordinated River Basin Management Plan Rhine 2022-2027.

The draft plan was published on the ICPR website in mid-April <https://www.iksr.org/en/eu-directives/european-water-framework-directive/river-basin-management-plan-2021>. Interested parties can still submit comments until 15 October 2021.

Contact person 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 and <https://twitter.com/ICPRhine>.