



Press release

Ministers continue success story and adopt “Rhine 2040” programme

Upon the invitation of Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, Minister for Infrastructure, Water Protection and Water Management, the responsible ministers and the representative of the European Union met in Amsterdam on 13 February 2020 for the 16th Rhine Ministerial Conference. They drew an overall positive balance of the implementation of the “Rhine 2020” programme and adopted the “Rhine 2040” programme with ambitious targets for species diversity, water quality, climate change, flood prevention and low water management.



Photo (from the left to the right): Ulrike Höfken (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany), Anne Trentels (Wallonia, Belgium), Daniel Calleja Crespo (European Union), Veronica Manfredi (President), Franziska Schwarz (Switzerland), Cora van Nieuwenhuizen (Netherlands), Günter Liebel (Austria), Svenja Schulze (Germany), Dominique Hasler (Liechtenstein), Carole Dieschbourg (Luxembourg); not on the photo: Simone Saillant (France)

Implementation of the “Rhine 2020” programme

The states in the Rhine catchment have been cooperating in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) for 70 years. Worldwide, this intensive cooperation has become an example for many other river catchments. In 2001, the states adopted the “Rhine 2020” programme.

During their current meeting in Amsterdam, the ministers and the representative of the European Union drew an overall positive balance of the implementation of the “Rhine 2020” programme. Some achievements:

- **Floods:** During the past 25 years since the great flooding of 1995, when the entire Rhine catchment area suffered considerable damage and around 250,000 people had to leave their homes in the Netherlands, the risk of damage has been reduced by a quarter. The states have invested more than 14 billion € in measures such as the construction of new flood retention areas. In addition, forecasting periods have been doubled and the publication of flood risk maps has increased awareness.
- **Migratory fish:** Since 2001, almost 600 obstacles to migration have been removed from the Rhine and its tributaries. The construction of fish passages on the Upper Rhine at Iffezheim (2000), Gamsheim (2006), Strasbourg (2016) and Gerstheim (2019) and the partial opening of the Haringvliet sluices near Rotterdam (2018) figure among the landmarks. This allows migratory fish to, again, reach many spawning habitats in the Rhine system; several hundreds of salmon are being detected, annually.
- **Water quality:** Since the turn of the century, water quality has been further improved. The modernisation of wastewater treatment plants has led to a distinct reduction of point source inputs of nitrogen, phosphorus, heavy metals and further noxious substances.
- **Species diversity:** During the past 20 years, some 140 km² of alluvial areas have been restored and 160 oxbow lakes have been reconnected with the Rhine. In addition, new nature conservation areas have been designated, such as the cross-border wetlands on the Upper Rhine covered by the RAMSAR Convention. This has created valuable habitats for water-dependent animals and plants.

New programme “Rhine 2040”

Despite considerable success, not all objectives have been fully achieved. The southern part of the Upper Rhine up to Basel is still not passable for migratory fish. Furthermore, the planning procedures for flood retention areas sometimes prove to be complex due to local resistance. Micropollutants from pharmaceutical residues, X-ray contrast agents and pesticides pose new threats to water quality. The hot and dry summer of 2018 has clearly shown, how climate change with long periods of drought can also affect the Rhine.

In line with the European “Green Deal” and the ambitious environmental policy of Switzerland and Liechtenstein, the Ministers and the representative of the European Union therefore intend to continue the successful cooperation in the Rhine catchment area over the next 20 years with undiminished commitment. The “Rhine 2040” programme is intended to reconcile the various uses with the protection of the ecosystem. It includes new, ambitious targets for different fields of action. The most important objectives are:

- **Adapt to climate change:** The ICPR climate adaptation strategy will be updated by 2025 in order to gain better knowledge and to develop further proposals for adaptation.
- **Cope with low water:** The low water monitoring will be continued, and joint solutions will be developed in order to be better prepared and manage low water in the future.
- **Complete fish passability:** Migratory fish shall be able to migrate from the North Sea up to the Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen and to colonise their habitats. For this purpose, on the Upper Rhine, fish passes at the barrages Rhinau (2024),

Marckolsheim (2026) and Vogelgrün (as soon as possible) have to be operational and at least 300 further migration obstacles in the catchment area have to be made passable.

- **Contain micropollutants:** In order to further improve water quality and to preserve the Rhine as a resource for drinking water production, the discharge of micropollutants, e.g. in the form of pharmaceuticals, x-ray contrast agents or pesticides into the Rhine and its tributaries is to be reduced by at least 30% by 2040. This target can be increased, if necessary.
- **Reactivate further floodplains:** By 2040, a further 200 km² of floodplains are to be restored and 100 oxbow lakes are to be connected to the Rhine. In addition, the river bank, which is heavily built-up in many places, is to be made more natural over an additional 400 km.
- **Reduce flood risk:** By 2040, the flood risk along the Rhine is to be reduced by a further 15 % compared to 2020, despite population growth and the associated settlement developments.

The "Rhine 2040" programme follows the overall concepts of the solidarity principle as well as a sustainable and climate-resilient water management. The countries in the Rhine catchment will continue their efforts under high pressure in cooperation with various interest groups and scientific institutions and will evaluate the implementation every six years.

Contact person for queries

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Details on the decisions

Details are listed in the brochure on the balance "Rhine 2020", the communiqué of the 16th Conference of Rhine Ministers and the text of the programme "Rhine 2040". All documents are published under www.iksr.org.

Background information on the ICPR

For 70 years, Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and the European Union have been cooperating in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) on the basis of a treaty under international law in order to reconcile the many different uses of the river and its protection. Their cooperation is based on a convention under international law. In order to fully implement European directives, this transboundary cooperation was extended to Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy and the Belgian region Wallonia.

The current President is Veronica Manfredi, Director at the European Commission. The President and the different ICPR fora are supported by the international staff of the Permanent Secretariat in Koblenz (Germany).

For its successful work since 1950, the ICPR was awarded the European RiverPrize in 2013 and the International Thiess RiverPrize in 2014. For detailed information on the ICPR please see to www.iksr.org.