



## Press release

### ***International and national water protection along the Rhine "30 years after Sandoz"***

#### ***Where are we today and what remains to be done?***

***Considerable investments into environmental protection and water protection triggered by the Sandoz warehouse fire 30 years ago have shown that it is possible to turn the former sewer Rhine into a largely clean river. Worldwide, the Rhine with its many uses and high industrial density on its banks has become an example for this development. Countless visitors from Asia, Africa, Middle and South America and invitations to participate in environmental congresses all over the world may serve as a proof.***

#### **Koblenz, 13 October 2016**

During a press conference staged on the NRW-laboratory ship Max Prüss in Koblenz, the location of the ICPR head office, the **International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)** and the German **River Basin Community Rhine** referred to this success which has only been possible thanks to the concerted, internationally and nationally coordinated approach following the Sandoz warehouse fire on 1 November 1986 in Schweizerhalle near Basel, when highly toxic pesticides were flushed into the Rhine together with the fire-fighting water and killed almost the entire stock of fish along 400 river kilometres.

The Chernobyl accident in 1986 raised further alarm! It was understood by policy, industry and the public. Within 11 months, the Rhine ministers in charge then drafted and adopted the Rhine Action Programme including precise discharge reduction targets. The salmon became the symbol for a recovering Rhine. Joint activities of authorities, industry and municipalities rapidly led to tangible success.

Ambitious reduction targets for industrial and municipal discharges of more than 40 substances were by far outperformed in percent as early as 1992, three years earlier than planned. In addition, the prevention of accidents including numerous measures

addressing the security of industrial plants has been considerably improved. Such significant advances are only possible when all actors work hand in hand to achieve ambitious targets. At that time, the development of water protection in Europe was fast-paced. This is underpinned by the establishment of further river basin commissions: In 1990, the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe, in 1994 the Commissions for the Protection of the Danube and of Meuse and Scheldt, in 1996 the International Commission for the Protection of the Odra were founded. The ICPR has been existing ever since 1950.

On 4 February 1995 and following the great floods of the Rhine in 1993 and 1995, the Ministers of Environment commissioned the ICPR to draft a joint Action Plan on Floods. It was more than plain that flood-related problems, just as problems of water quality can only be addressed at a transboundary level. Today, river basin coordination as well as international coordination are obligations under EU legislation (Water Framework Directive/WFD, Flood Risk Management Directive - FD).

### **And where are we today?**

The second Rhine Convention (1999) governs integrated water management as a joint objective comprising water quality, water ecology and flood prevention which are detailed in the "Rhine 2020" programme.

The implementation of the EU Directives is progressing. Due to the WFD, a good status/good potential of all waters should have been achieved by 2015. Many targets have not yet been achieved, as due to factors such as historical pollution and high nutrient inputs some substances still pose a problem. On the other hand, ecological deficits such as numerous transverse structures and poorly structured river banks are an obstacle to the improvement of the status of waters at the planned pace. But progress is apparent: more and more adult salmon migrate into the Upper Rhine as far as upstream of Strasbourg to reproduce in their former home waters. But further fish passages are required in order to make the tributaries in the Basel area accessible.

The effects of climate change, in particular changing discharges and water temperatures represent new challenges to address. The winters are expected to become more humid, while summers will presumably be drier. Also, for regional/local heavy rainfall such as during the summer 2016, measures must be developed to reduce adverse consequences. Climate changes impact many issues, such as flood protection, drinking water supply, industrial activities, agriculture, navigation and natural habitats. Therefore, low water is another topic discussed within the ICPR.

In order to improve flood protection of the Rhine, further flood retention areas or, generally speaking, "More room for the river" is required. The efforts of the states must not slacken. Recently, the ICPR developed a tool to demonstrate the effect of flood prevention measures.

Furthermore, many micro-pollutants, such as pharmaceuticals, hormones, pesticides, odoriferous substances in cleaning agents, radiopaque contrast agents are detected in the waters in the Rhine catchment, some of which are not withheld in traditional wastewater treatment plants. The ICPR has developed a strategy addressing the relevant groups of substances and their discharge pathways. The next step will be to discuss future measures in the Rhine catchment.

The state of the Rhine is developing in the right direction. However, in all states efforts must be carried on relentlessly. This also implies continuous monitoring of water quality and the consequent implementation of many measures still to be taken.

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## **Short information on the ICPR and the FGG Rhein**

### **International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)**

*As Rhine bordering countries, Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands as well as Luxemburg and the European Community co-operate within the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) on the basis of a treaty under international law. The President (at the time being Mr. Gustaaf Borchardt from the Netherlands) and the different ICPR fora are supported by the international staff of the permanent secretariat in Koblenz (Germany). Furthermore, the secretariat gives support to the countries in the Rhine watershed when implementing the European Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) and the European Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks (Directive 2007/60/EC). To this end, cross-border co-operation was extended to Austria, Liechtenstein and the Belgian region Wallonia. The working languages of the ICPR are German, French and Dutch. For detailed information on the ICPR please browse to the ICPR website: [www.iksr.org](http://www.iksr.org).*

### **River Basin Community Rhine (FGG Rhein)**

*The German federal states Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia, Rhineland Palatinate, Saarland, Thuringia and the Federal Republic of Germany founded the FGG Rhine with a view to improving the cooperation and international coordination in the sector of water protection in the German part of the Rhine river basin. Within the FGG, the German federal states along the Rhine and the federal government determine coordinated positions on topics of water management from the outlet of the Rhine from Lake Constance to the German-Dutch border. The joint work of the federal states and of the federal government on all aspects of water management are being coordinated in the office of the FGG Rhine located in Worms. In 3-year-turns, each member of the FGG assumes the presidency of the FGG Rhine and thus also of the Conference of Rhine Ministers. North Rhine Westphalia took over the presidency for the period 2015-2017. Detailed information on the FGG Rhine are found on its homepage [www.fgg-rhein.de](http://www.fgg-rhein.de).*