

12th Conference of Rhine Ministers

Ministerial Declaration

22 January 1998 in Rotterdam

**MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON THE 12TH CONFERENCE OF
MINISTERS ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RHINE**

Rotterdam, 22 January 1998

The members of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine met at ministerial level in Rotterdam on 22 January 1998 under the presidency of Mrs. Jorritsma-Lebbink, Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management in the Netherlands.

The participants in the conference were:

For the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Erhard JAUCK, Secretary of State, representing Mrs. Merkel, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety;

For France, Mrs. Dominique VOYNET, Minister for Spatial Planning and Environment

For Luxembourg, Mr. Hubert WURTH, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in the Netherlands

For the Netherlands, Mrs. Annemarie JORRITSMA-LEBBINK, Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management

For Switzerland, Mr. Moritz LEUENBERGER, Member of the Federal Council, Head of the Swiss Ministry of Environment, Traffic, Energy and Communication

For the European Commission, Mr. Helmut BLÖCH, representing Mrs. Bjerregaard, Commissioner for Environment, Nuclear Safety, Civil Protection and Fisheries Policy

For the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, Mr. Dominique MOYEN, President of the Commission

As observers

Representatives of intergovernmental organizations and non governmental organizations

I. Noticeable improvement of the Rhine ecosystem

Report on the state of the Rhine '97 – Results and assessment

- I.1 The Ministers of the countries bordering the Rhine responsible for the protection of the Rhine and the representative of the European Commission (henceforth: the Ministers) have taken note of the report on the state of the Rhine 1997 with great interest.

They state with satisfaction that due to the great efforts of all Rhine bordering countries the ambitious goals set in the Rhine Action Programme (RAP) have largely been reached. The implementation of the RAP has led to a considerable improvement of the Rhine water quality.

- I.2 The development of the Rhine water quality is very positive. Measures aimed at industrial and municipal point source inputs have led to a reduction of most priority substances by more than half, in many cases even by 80 %. Today more than 95 % of the more than 50 million inhabitants of the Rhine catchment area are connected to modern mostly three-stage wastewater treatment plants.

The encouraging change in trend of the nitrate contamination of the Rhine recorded since the beginning of the 90ies is certainly due to the increasing nitrification and denitrification in municipal wastewater treatment plants, but presumably also to the beginning extensification in agriculture. Despite the falling nutrient contamination there is still need for action in this field.

The good water quality has also triggered a positive ecological development; the success of the programme for the return of the salmon is plain to everyone.

- I.3 The Ministers are pleased to note that the inventory of the biological and ecological state of the Rhine has led to encouraging results:

Up to 45 fish species have returned to live in the Rhine. Improved patency of some Rhine affluents, improved spawning grounds and specific stocking measures have led to the return to the Rhine catchment area of the first salmons. However, the structure of fish habitats and the patency of the river system must be further improved. The first visible sign of improvement in the main river will be the construction of the fish passage at the Iffezheim barrage in 1998.

The inventories of invertebrate micro-organisms, of plankton and waterfowl give further evidence of the good biological state of the Rhine.

- I.4 Concerning the prevention of accidents and the safety of industrial plants the Ministers note that the safety level of industrial plants in the Rhine basin has distinctly improved compared to the past and that only few industrial incidents and accidents have been recorded.

- I.5 The Ministers take note that the important problems regarding the discharge of waste from ships on the Rhine have been settled in an international agreement (Agreement on the collection, delivery and acceptance of waste in Rhine and inland navigation). They invite the member states to integrate this settlement into national law and to implement it as soon as possible.
- I.6 They state that when preparing this conference of ministers, the exchange of information with the non governmental organizations proved successful. They welcome their presence during the 12th conference of Rhine ministers.
- I.7 The Ministers affirm the necessity of continuing the efforts towards protecting the Rhine.

II. The Rhine and its future: steps towards a holistic and sustainable protection of the Rhine

The Ministers affirm the necessity of holistic, trend-setting water pollution control as the only possibility of taking into account the natural network and the various inter-relationships in a river basin. The approach by policy fields as largely practised hitherto must be replaced by a holistic combination of water pollution control, management and use of water bodies, use of energy, flood protection, fisheries, nature and landscape protection, spatial planning, navigation and agriculture.

II.1 Guidelines for a programme towards sustainable development

The Ministers state that a high level of protection has been reached due to the Rhine Action Programme. They speak up for the necessity of considerable contributions to the sustainable development of the holistic Rhine system in the next phase of work.

The Ministers adopt the guidelines for a programme towards sustainable development of the Rhine and ask the ICPR to draft a programme together with the institutions and associations concerned by mid-1999, taking into consideration the following cornerstones:

- ensuring and preserving the present high level in the fields of:
drinking water production and supply, waste water input and treatment, safety of industrial plants, protection of stretches of free flowing water, water way Rhine;
- holistic approach, interlocking and integration of measures in the fields of:
water quality, flood prevention and protection, protection and improvement of the ecosystem and ground water protection;
- use of modern river management instruments:
auto-control, modernization of Rhine surveillance, reinforcement of sole responsibility and support of environmentally compatible farming;
- improvement of public relations and of passing on of information by target group-oriented public relations, by contributions to environmental education and by creating on-line information systems

II.2 Habitat patch connectivity and atlas of the Rhine

The Ministers state that the first steps towards protecting, preserving and improving reaches of ecological importance have been taken. They note the inventory of reaches of ecological importance from Lake Constance to the North Sea with satisfaction and consider the concept of a habitat patch connectivity as essential for the restoration of the Rhine ecosystem.

The Ministers charge the ICPR to put the next steps towards a habitat patch connectivity along the Rhine into concrete terms by i. a. fixing the criteria, a detailed timetable and the quality assurance.

They welcome the maps of the ICPR-atlas and consider the general ecological model and the targets of development for the different sections of the Rhine to be an important basis for future work. They take the view that the Rhine bordering countries should fix the framework conditions for the habitat patch connectivity on this basis and that they should establish their plans accordingly. The improvement of the patency of the Upper Rhine should be part of this work. They charge the ICPR to co-ordinate these national measures.

With this approach a holistic concept for a habitat patch connectivity is world-wide being realised for the first time in a very big river basin. Measures aimed at ecological improvement and flood protection are to be interlocked with a view to improve the structure of the river and to extend and reactivate alluvial areas.

The successfully started Salmon 2000-programme must be consequently continued after the year 2000. Its target is to develop a viable stock of salmon with natural reproduction in the Rhine area.

II.3 Action Plan on Flood Defence

The Ministers confirm that flood prevention and defence remain indispensable. The atlas of the Rhine includes the embankments and floodplains and illustrates the large areas at risk of extreme floodings along the Rhine. The Ministers welcome the rapidly drafted ICPR Action Plan on Flood Defence including a long term strategy to reduce flood damages.

The Ministers adopt the Action Plan on Flood Defence aimed at the improved protection of man and material goods against floodings and including the aim of an ecological improvement of the Rhine and its alluvial areas. This Action Plan on Flood Defence ensures that all actors concerned by flood defence are involved in the work and that all plans are co-ordinated.

The Ministers confirm the following targets of the Action Plan on Flood Defence:

- no increase of damage risks until the year 2000, reduction up to 10 % by the year 2005 and up to 25 % by the year 2020.
- reduction of extreme flood levels downstream of the regulated stretch up to 30 cm by the year 2005 and up to 70 cm by the year 2020.
- increased awareness of flood danger by drafting maps of 50 % of the floodplains and areas at flood risk by the year 2000 and of 100 % by the year 2005.
- short term improvement of flood warning systems by international co-operation. Extension of the forecasting period up to 50 % by the year 2000 and up to 100 % by the year 2005.

The Ministers state that a first bundle of measures will be implemented by the year 2000. They invite the member states to specify the measures planned for the period 2000 to 2005 so as to be able to draft an operational stage programme for the implementation of the Action Plan on Flood Defence. They charge the ICPR to co-ordinate the stage programme and to carry out success control.

Due to the great importance of the Action Plan on Flood Defence and the great risks of damage in the areas at flood risk, the Ministers invite all persons responsible to take the necessary measures with priority, even in times of financial bottlenecks.

The Ministers welcome the support of the European Community in matters of preventive flood protection .

The Ministers note with satisfaction the transboundary co-operation of the province of Gelderland and the Land Northrhine-Westfalia in matters of preventive flood protection.

II.4 New Convention on the Protection of the Rhine

The Ministers welcome the new trend-setting Convention on the Protection of the Rhine. Its new targets are: the sustainable development of the Rhine ecosystem, holistic flood prevention and defence, taking into account ecological requirements, preservation, improvement and restoration of as natural habitats as possible and of the natural stream function, incorporation of ground water, as far as it interacts with the Rhine, improvement of organizational and working structures.

The Ministers welcome the possibility offered by the new convention to let non governmental organizations participate in the work of the ICPR.

1. The Ministers adopt the text of the new convention and confirm their intention to sign it, as soon as the required national co-ordination has been accomplished.
2. They charge the ICPR to start working according to the contents of the new convention.
3. The Ministers of the European Union take the view that the experience and the results obtained within the ICPR should continue to be taken into account when drafting the framework directive on water within the European Union.
4. The Ministers note that the future framework directive water may lead to new discussions of certain elements of the Convention within the ICPR before it may be ratified by the contracting parties.