



**17<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL "EUROPE INBO 2019" CONFERENCE  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN WATER DIRECTIVES**

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**EUROPE-INBO 2019  
Lahti, Finland  
17 – 20 June 2019**

## **"DECLARATION OF LAHTI"**

### **The future of the European Water Directives: Let's affirm our ambitions**

The 17<sup>th</sup> conference of the "EUROPE-INBO" group, which took place in Lahti, Finland, from 17 to 20 June 2019, gathered 142 participants, representatives of national and local administrations, basin organizations and elected officials as well as of NGOs, companies, international and regional organizations and academic institutions, coming from 30 countries.

The "EUROPE-INBO" Group of European basin organizations for the implementation of the European Water Directives was established in 2003 in Valencia, Spain, within INBO.

It aims to enrich and promote, through exchanges of practical field experiences, the implementation of water policies in Europe, particularly under the Common Implementation Strategy. The "EUROPE-INBO" group supports the Member States of the European Union (EU) as well as the Candidate Countries and disseminates the principles and tools of the European Water Directives. It participates in debates on the implementation of these Water Directives in the EU and on a territory enlarged to the EU's neighboring partner countries, in the Balkans, in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and in the Mediterranean. Its last meeting was held in Seville in 2018.

At the sub-regional level, these exchanges are also organized and expanded within the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (MENBO), and the Network of Basin Organizations of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA - NBO).

The work of the "EUROPE-INBO 2019" conference was organized around a workshop on the integration of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) into the WFD's Programs of Measures for the restoration of basins with a focus on lakes and in five sessions that addressed the following topical issues:

- Water Quality: the objective of good ecological status and the challenge of microplastics;
- Agriculture and climate change: the stakes for agroecology, non-point source pollution, water availability;
- Towards a practical review of the WFD application: how to deal with exemptions and "one-out all-out" principle;

- Integrated management of basins and coastal waters: strengthening consistency;
- International and Transboundary Cooperation (especially under the WFD, between Member and Non-Members States)

Many high quality papers have been the basis for interesting debate.

- **Roundtable 1: Water Quality: the objective of good ecological status and the challenge of microplastics**

## Findings

The European Environment Agency recently assessed the status of water bodies in Europe. It indicates that quality recovery of contaminated waters has not yet been achieved, whereas the deadline was set for 2015 when the WFD was adopted.

For a substantial percentage of water bodies (47%), it is unlikely that good status will be reached by 2027, the final deadline set by the WFD, despite a well-developed and well-organized European legislative framework.

Therefore, the question of extending this deadline according to some conditions may arise.

Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in the individual parameters of ecological status (biological quality parameters supporting physicochemical quality and hydro-morphological parameters): about 40% of EU surface waters have a good or high ecological status or potential.

The overall situation, however, clearly shows that much remains to be done to improve the quality of water bodies, which justifies the continuation and strengthening of action over a longer period.

The challenge is also to better take account of the impacts of climate change on water quality, either directly, e.g. by warming water, accelerating biological processes, or by reducing quantities, which leads to the concentration of pollutants.

The development of microplastics is also a pollution problem that needs to be taken into consideration in the WFD.

Since the adoption of the WFD, new strategies and policies have been launched on "new" pollutants generated by the use of substances necessary for the health of humans, animals or plants, and micropollutants, which include microplastics that are becoming a major global problem for the environment and biodiversity. We know that 80% of marine plastics come from the land, therefore from the basins of lakes and rivers.

Plastics are non-biodegradable and composed of chemical additives, some of which having a high toxicity. Reduced to microplastics then to nanoplastics they enter the chain of ecosystems and have an impact on the marine fauna and finally, of course, on human health.

At the EU level, efforts have been made to reduce, ban or recycle petroleum-based plastics with the 2015 Plastic Bags Directive and the 2018 "EU Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy" and the incentive to produce bioplastics.

## Recommendations

Regarding the goal of good status, EUROPE INBO members consider that the WFD deadline should be extended to 2027 with adopting measures on the following points:

- Strengthening the implementation of the Directive by targeting actions such as prevention of pollution by agricultural nitrates, investments for the treatment of domestic wastewater or industrial environmental permits;
- Better integration between the Directives and sectoral policies: the objectives of the WFD must be better incorporated into other European policies (CAP, industry, energy and transport in particular).
- Increasing the means for inspection and control.

As regards microplastics, it is first of all necessary to bring water and biodiversity policies closer.

The policies and strategies implemented to eradicate microplastics must be taken into account in the assessment objectives of the WFD. Whenever possible, the WFD should include the implementation of these strategies in line with its objectives.

In this respect, it should be noted that the plastics strategy has been included in the proposal for a directive on drinking water.

This strategy should also lead to some amendments to the Urban Wastewater Directive.

More particularly, the Basin Management Plans and the Programs of Measures should integrate the issue of microplastics. This requires an adaptation of the legal framework and a more consistent approach between the WFD and other relevant policies.

Keeping in mind that practical action is undertaken at basin level, the EU Commission should achieve an analysis in order defining precisely what needs to be done at this level and about the solutions to be implemented by the Basin Organizations through management plans and programs of measures, to meet the challenge of microplastics.

- **Roundtable 2: Agriculture and climate change: the stakes for agroecology, non-point source pollution, water availability;**

## Findings

Non-point source pollution affects 38% of surface water bodies. One of the main impacts of pressures on surface water bodies is nutrient enrichment, which leads to eutrophication and therefore mortality of the aquatic ecosystem, to which must be added the difficulties of producing drinking water.

The new CAP, beyond 2020, is under development and aims to make agricultural policy more responsive and adapted to current and future challenges.

Addressing environmental and climate challenges is one of the goals set out in the proposals. Thus, the general objective of the CAP for the environment is to "contribute to the achievement of the EU's environmental and climate goals", which is more ambitious than the current overall objective of sustainable development of agriculture.

The proposals are based on a "comprehensive approach", which stipulates that conditionality and actions of Pillar I and II must be coordinated and consistent in the new CAP strategic plans that each Member State will have to produce.

However, the challenges facing agriculture are not simple in a context of changing climate, demography and consumption patterns. Agriculture is required to produce at least as much food as needed to meet consumer demand, by considerably improving its quality, using the smallest possible chemical input and opting for short circuits, essentially local production for local consumption, all this in farming systems respectful of the environment, especially regarding water resources and biodiversity.

To support the preparation of the new CAP and its relations with water, a public consultation on the impacts of agricultural policy on water will be carried out at the beginning of 2020. It will feed an assessment of the CAP impact on water. This assessment will cover all 2014-2020 CAP instruments and will determine the effectiveness of the measures, their compliance with the legislation, their relevance and their added value. It will have to identify and better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the various CAP instruments in addressing water-related issues in agriculture.

Agroecology or organic farming has developed in recent years, with both European support and awareness of producers and consumers. Nevertheless, EU agriculture is still very largely a "conventional" agriculture and the areas converted to organic agriculture barely reach 7% of the total, with significant differences between countries

## Recommendations

It is necessary to better define the water-agriculture-food-environment nexus which is of a great complexity and which has no simple realistic solution.

The development of agroecology is to be introduced into the WFD as a means to achieve its objectives. There is a need to better integrate water management concerns into agricultural policy. Conversely, for effectiveness in the field, it is necessary to ensure that water policy takes into account the constraints and realities of the agricultural sector.

For this purpose, it is necessary to engage local farming communities in the processes of drafting basin management plans and programs of measures. The Basin Organizations that are naturally at the core of this mechanism must be involved in the preparation of the framework defining the mechanism.

The example of the Guadalquivir on agriculture and climate change, with a very important park of large dams that guarantee the security of supplies, raises the issue about the possible lack of coherence existing between the policies of dismantlement of artificial obstacles in rivers and the new trend observed in climate change adaptation forums in line with water-energy-food-environment nexus (especially in the Euro-Mediterranean area), which proposes the use of these multiple uses to cope with these new challenges, in scenarios of decreasing water resources.

A better link between the Management Plans / Programs of Measures and the CAP is to be realized through the following actions:

- Translating the measures of the Management Plans and Programs of Measures into "actions" of the CAP;
- Facilitating the agricultural sector's readability of the WFD by using the language of the CAP;
- Participating in the strategic environmental assessments planned in the process of preparing the Strategic Agricultural Plan of each country;
- Integrating knowledge of water policy into the training of agricultural advisory services;
- Making sure that the Strategic Agricultural Plan is an opportunity to develop local and suited solutions.

It is also necessary to have true actions to the Commission's proposals regarding the agricultural sector's reuse of treated urban wastewater, especially in terms of the harmonization of minimum quality standards.

- **Roundtable 3: Towards a practical review of the WFD application: how to deal with exemptions and "one-out all-out" principle**

## Findings

The WFD allows using the exemptions for achieving the objectives. Article 4.4 of the Directive allows for the postponement of the deadline for achieving environmental objectives - good ecological status or potential, good chemical status and good quantitative status of groundwater. The possible postponement concerns two management cycles from 2015 onwards, this means until 2027.

The exemption could be justified with technical feasibility or disproportionate. After 2027, the postponement can be justified only with natural conditions. Therefore, all the measures necessary to achieve the objectives have to be implemented by 2027.

The good ecological status of a water body is considered to be reached if all the quality elements are qualified as being good and the over all status is based on the lowest any quality element. ; it is the "one out all out" principle.

With such a principle, the ecological classification thus obtained does not reflect the partial progress made in the basins. However, the status of groundwaters does not always reflect the progress made in improving chemical status of surface waters.

## Recommendations

Up to now, many countries have used exemptions mainly focused on the extending the deadlines for achieving the environmental objectives.

For the next update of the RBMPs there might be necessary that the Basin Organizations to start the discussion on defining less stringent objectives. It was suggested that an discussion should be started between the Basin Organizations. The Commission should to define the framework for exemption beyond 2027.

The EUROPE-INBO members consider that the "one out all out" principle do not necessary show all the improvement in the water quality. It is important to develop other indicators, which could be more informative and they could be use in communication and hearing processes.

The RPMPs include a lot of information, because they are design to be reporting tools. The reporting is done nowadays electronically, which gives MS/River Basin Authorities more flexibility to develop more informative tools for public.

In addition, a short report could be drafted to highlight the results achieved during the WFD implementation cycle in the basin.

- **Roundtable 4: Integrated management of basins and coastal waters: strengthening consistency**

The WFD includes marine debris in the Good Environmental Status (by 2020). Due to their volume or their properties, they should not cause any damage to the marine and coastal environment. Conversely, rivers are carrying significant volumes of solid wastes such as plastics to the seas and oceans. Coastal areas are thus influenced by the land-based area of the basin and by the marine environment of the sea.

The WFD and Marine Strategy Directive share the waters of this coastal area called "coastal waters".

The review of both Directives shows many similarities in terms of purpose or methodology. Nevertheless, there are differences, e.g. on the definition of good status, on indicators or approaches.

To improve the effectiveness of both coastal water directives, it is essential that consistency between the directives and the cooperation between its stakeholders be significantly increased.

## Recommendations

A real synergy should be developed between the WFD and the Marine Strategy Directive.

It is especially advisable that the methodologies for assessing the status of coastal waters be brought closer together, especially with regard to pollution originating from both the hinterland and the marine area. Similarly, a joint analysis of the impact of land-based activities on coastal waters and the impact of marine activities on these same waters should be taken into account.

Keeping this in mind, EUROPE INBO members underlined the importance of strong coordination between the various administrative services and people who implement both directives This is all the more necessary since they are often in different ministries. This coordination also applies to stakeholders and partners.

The participants in the conference believe that beyond what needs to be done at the European level, the coordination approach for greater consistency and effectiveness in the field should be developed at local level, with greater involvement of local authorities and field stakeholders in the practical implementation of both directives.

- **Roundtable 5: International and Transboundary Cooperation (especially under the WFD, between Member and Non-Members States)**

Noting that 60% of the EU territory is located in transboundary basins, and that many aquifers are shared between several Member States with, in addition, many shared basins with neighboring countries of the EU, cooperation should be coherent within the EU and between Member States and neighboring countries. Moreover, this international cooperation within the EU must be in line with international conventions such as the Water Convention and the New York Convention.

These international conventions provide a relevant framework for improving governance in transboundary basins. They must be considered as a basis for cooperation on shared waters. These agreements, together with the WFD, allow real progress to be made towards integrated and shared water resources management in EU transboundary basins.

This is why it is important for EU transboundary basins to develop or strengthen such cooperation.

Transboundary water cooperation, equitable and reasonable water allocation between riparian countries and all water uses and the observance of the programmes of monitoring the quality and controlling the discharges are a key to improve water security for societies, natural ecosystems and the environment.

The members of EUROPE INBO warmly welcome the recent EU Council Conclusion of Water Diplomacy: it gives us a strong political backbone for our future efforts to strengthen water cooperation and using water talks as a route to avoid or solve conflicts.

Accordingly, the International Commissions established in Europe have a decisive role in the implementation of the WFD and international conventions.

EUROPE INBO members consider that their work and their working groups should be able to be part of a European perspective.

With a view to greater efficiency, pooling their work would be advisable and complementarity with the work of the CIS (European Common Implementation Strategy) should be sought for better WFD implementation as well as a convergence of national policies within these transboundary districts.

Support to these Commissions should be strengthened, inter alia, with the help of the EU Commission.

It is necessary to promote the international cooperation among the local authorities and the financing mechanisms such as the « 1% » which complete the range of donors and the traditional modes of actions in order to reach the sustainable development goals.

For WFD objectives to be achieved in these international districts, cooperation agreements between riparian countries should be signed to create enabling conditions for appropriate governance, based on mutual trust, on a common understanding of the basin's problems and on accurate, reliable, accessible and shared data and analyses with stakeholders' involvement.

The Conference participants suggested that experiences in WFD implementation in shared basins with these neighboring countries should be widely disseminated in an adaptive way noting the local environmental and socioeconomic conditions and the lessons learned from these experiences highlighted. This may concern basins shared with countries of the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

### **Conclusions of the Workshop on integration of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) into the WFD's Programs of Measures for the restoration of basins:**

Nature based solutions (NBS) are trending as they simultaneously have the capacity to restore degraded ecosystems, to improve society resilience and risk management, to mitigate climate change impacts, and to offer solutions for sustainable land management and planning.

However, the potential of NBS for water management should not be undervalued: they constitute a key towards better integration and linkages between biodiversity and water management policies, by providing cross-sectoral and practical solutions.

The objective of this workshop was to compare practices and concrete experiences of Member States and basin organizations on dealing with the implementation of NBS and its integration into water resources management, flood risk, ecosystems and water quality and promote the exchange of questions and solutions in this domain.

NBS could offer complementary or alternative solutions towards reaching objectives of the "Water Directives" and thus could be integrated while designing the WFD programme of measures or Actions towards mitigating flood risks.

They should be identified and implemented based on involvement of stakeholders, while seeking for multiple benefits and purposes.

To raise awareness of stakeholders and develop their commitment in defining solutions, the local level must be targeted.

The Basin Organizations can facilitate the process, noting that a local approach has to be developed in the great basins

It is recommended to continue and strengthen the exchanges on their definition but moreover on their inclusion as an usual tool while implementing the European Directives.

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The "EUROPE-INBO 2019" conference expresses the point of view and the proposals of the EU Basin Organizations based on their experience. Its members are key stakeholders in the implementation of European water policy.

The participants in the EUROPE-INBO conference consider that efforts made to implement the WFD need to be supported and adapted so that all EU Water Bodies get closer to "Good Status" within a reasonable and realistic time frame.

The participants thanked Spain for having fulfilled with success the EUROPE-INBO Group presidency during the year 2018/2019 since the Seville Conference.

The Presidency of the EUROPE-INBO Group for the coming year until the next conference in 2020 was transferred to Finland. Mr. Timo Jokelainen, Director of the ELY-Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Lapland, Chair of both the Finnish-Swedish Transboundary River Commission and the Norwegian-Finnish Commission on Transboundary Waters has been appointed as President of EUROPE-INBO for 2019 - 2020.

The delegates thanked the Finn Authorities for the perfect organization of this 17<sup>th</sup> Conference and for their excellent welcome.

The delegates acknowledged with gratitude the proposal of Malta to organize the 18<sup>th</sup> EUROPE-INBO Conference in 2020.

### **Approved in Lahti on 19 June 2019**

The Final Declaration, all papers and photographs of the conference are available on the website: [www.inbo-news.org](http://www.inbo-news.org)