
Significant Water Management Issues in the Danube River Basin District - Summary

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International
Commission
for the Protection
of the Danube River

Internationale
Kommission
zum Schutz
der Donau



Highlighting the main issues of the
ICPDR Document on Significant Water Management Issues

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1. The Danube River Basin District and EU Water Legislation

In December 2000, the ‘Water Framework Directive’ (WFD) of the European Union (EU) came into force. The WFD requires all EU surface inland, transitional and coastal waters, and groundwaters, to reach "good status" or “good ecological potential” by 2015. This is achieved by meeting demanding environmental objectives, especially ecological and chemical targets.

In response, the countries cooperating under the Danube River Protection Convention, including those outside the EU, agreed to implement the WFD throughout the entire Danube River Basin District (see Map 1). The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) became the platform for coordinating basin-wide WFD-related activities.

In 2004, the first step of the WFD process was completed by finalizing the ‘Danube River Basin Analysis’. It is the first comprehensive description of the basin’s transboundary surface and ground waters, and significant human pressures which impact them. It also represents the basis for the WFD-required completion of the ‘Danube River Basin Management Plan’ (known hereafter as the ‘Plan’) and its ‘Joint Programme of Measures’ (JPM) by 2009.

Based on this analysis the ICPDR prepared and published the document on ‘**Significant Water Management Issues in the Danube River Basin District**’, which guides the ICPDR and Danube countries in preparing the full Plan. It highlights **four specific significant water management issues for surface waters**, and in addition **two transboundary groundwater issues**, each with one accompanying **vision** and a number of **management objectives** to be achieved by 2015. Also included are a **timeline** for completing the Plan and an explanation of the related **public consultation process**.

2. The Danube Basin-Wide Approach

River basin management plans will be developed according to **three scales**: (1) Danube River Basin District (Part A); (2) national level and/or internationally coordinated sub-basin level for selected sub-basins (Part B); and sub-unit level (Part C). As information increases in detail from Part A via Part B to Part C, Part A will therefore be based largely on the findings of Parts B and C and will provide an aggregated view. In the end, the Plan will largely be based on national measures - which are put into a Danube basin-wide context - complemented by the coordination of measures at the basin-wide scale and for selected sub-basins.

Basin-wide **long-term visions** based on shared values, and **specific management objectives**, will guide the Danube countries toward their commonly agreed goals. The management objectives will describe the first steps toward identifying the measures and their implementation needed to meet the environmental objectives of the WFD by 2015.

By following a **basin-wide approach**, the Plan will have many benefits such as addressing environmental issues that may otherwise not be addressed by individual countries (e.g. Black Sea pollution, and continuous migration of sturgeon species from the Black Sea to upper parts of the Danube River Basin District) and improved communication flows (e.g. for early flood warnings). The wide array of conditions in the Danube countries (e.g. economic status) will also be taken into account. The (basin-wide) **Joint Programme of Measures** will thus be coordinated with national programmes of measures, recognizing that many national measures have already been taken throughout the basin to improve the water status.

Finally, the **financing** of the measures will be dependent upon the various circumstances of, and opportunities open to, the different Danube countries. Furthermore, the ICPDR will promote

information exchange about possible financing instruments and international financing institutions to implement the measures.

3. Significant Water Management Issues

There are four significant water management issues in the Danube Basin District for surface waters: pollution by (1) organic substances, (2) nutrients and (3) hazardous substances, and alterations to (4) hydromorphology (i.e. the structural characteristics of the shape, boundaries and content of rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters); and two transboundary groundwater issues including alterations to (1) quality and (2) quantity.

Management objectives are defined separately for EU Member States, EU Accession Countries and Non-EU Member States. In many cases, a management objective for the EU Member States is equivalent to implementing other water-related EU Directives (i.e. EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, EU Nitrates Directive) within the legally established time frames.

In the future, for each significant issue mentioned above, more detailed sets of measures will be compiled, to be implemented by 2015 as part of the Plan. Other possible issues and their basin-wide significance are also being investigated such as changes in water quantity (e.g. floods and droughts), climate change and sediment transport. Another important goal for the Plan is to inter-link flood management, flood protection measures and measures to achieve the WFD objectives.

The following is a list of the visions for each significant issue, with selected examples of their related management objectives (*For a comprehensive list of all the management objectives, please see the full ICPDR document 'Significant Water Management Issues in the Danube River Basin District'*):

3.1. Surface water: Organic pollution

Vision: Zero emission of untreated waste waters.

Management Objective: In the EU Member States, phase out, by 2015 at the latest, all discharges of untreated wastewater from towns with populations over 10,000; in other Danube States the number of wastewater collecting systems linked to treatment plants and operational by 2015 will be specified. The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive will be implemented by EU Member States.

3.2. Surface water: Nutrient pollution

Vision: Danube Basin and Black Sea waters are no longer threatened by eutrophication.

Management Objectives: Reduce nutrient discharges (nitrogen; phosphorus) within the Danube River Basin District and to the Black Sea coastal areas, both from wastewater treatment plants as well as from diffuse sources; reduce phosphates in detergent products; and implement the EU Nitrates Directive in EU Member States.

3.3. Surface water: Hazardous pollution

Vision: Hazardous substances pose no risk to human health and aquatic systems.

Management Objective: Implement 'Best Available Techniques and Environmental Practices' including the further improvement of treatment efficiency. The Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive will be implemented by EU Member States.

3.4. Surface water: Hydromorphological alterations

Vision: Aquatic ecosystems function holistically and are home to all native species.

Management Objectives: Construct fish migration aids; re-connect adjacent floodplains and wetlands; and conduct necessary Environmental Impact Assessments and/or a Strategic Environmental Assessment during the planning phase of future infrastructure projects.

3.5. Groundwater: Alterations to quality

Vision: Polluting substances do not deteriorate groundwater quality, and where already polluted, restoration will be the goal.

Management Objectives: Increase wastewater treatment efficiency; and implement the EU Groundwater Directive and the EU Nitrates Directive in the EU Member States.

3.6. Groundwater: Alterations to quantity

Vision: Water use does not exceed available groundwater resources, especially considering the future impacts of climate change.

Management Objectives: Avoid the over-abstraction of groundwater bodies

4. Timeline and Public Participation

The overall process toward completing the Plan entails full public participation and consultation, including the provision of all relevant documents for public review and comment. Until the end of 2008, national data for the Plan will be collected and public consultation on the national level will start. The ICPDR will then produce a document, presenting the status of preparing the overall Plan and the Joint Programme of Measures, to support national public participation efforts. Starting from January to June 2009 the draft Plan will be compiled (Part A). An international public consultation phase will last from June until October 2009¹. After incorporating all public input, a revised draft will be presented in December 2009. The final Plan should be endorsed by Ministers in February 2010.

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¹ The timeline for public participation and public consultation might still be revised after the publication of this document due to the discussions and respective developments during 2008.

Map 1: Overview Danube River Basin District

