



**15th "EUROPE-INBO 2017" INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN WATER DIRECTIVES**

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**Dublin - Malahide, Ireland  
20 – 23 September 2017**

## **"EUROPE-INBO DECLARATION OF MALAHIDE"**

**Final Version 07**

The 15<sup>th</sup> conference of the "EUROPE-INBO" group, which took place in Dublin, Ireland, from 20 to 23 September 2017, at the invitation of the Irish Authorities, gathered 126 participants, representatives of national administrations, basin organizations and elected officials as well as of NGOs, companies, international and regional organizations and academic institutions, coming from 33 countries.

Established within INBO in 2003 in Valencia, Spain, the "EUROPE-INBO" Group of European Basin Organizations for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD – 2000/60/EC) aims at enriching the implementation of water policies in Europe, especially the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) with its practical field experience to support the European and Candidate Countries and disseminate the principles and tools of European water-related Directives. It participates in the debates on the implementation of these Directives in the European territories, including overseas lands, and in an enlarged territory especially towards the EU neighbouring partner countries in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and the Mediterranean.

In such a context and as part of INBO, the Central and Eastern European Network of Basin Organizations (CEENBO), the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (MENBO), and the new Network of Basin Organizations of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA - NBO), facilitate, in their respective regions, the exchanges of experience and discussions on basin management.

The "EUROPE-INBO" group holds annual plenary assemblies: Valencia (Spain) in 2003, Krakow (Poland) in 2004, Namur (Belgium) in 2005, Megeve (France) in 2006, Rome (Italy) in 2007, Sibiu (Romania) in 2008, Stockholm (Sweden) in 2009, Megeve (France) in 2010, Oporto (Portugal) in 2011, Istanbul (Turkey) in 2012, Plovdiv (Bulgaria) in 2013, Bucharest (Romania) in 2014, Thessaloniki (Greece) in 2015 and Lourdes (France) in 2016.

The work of the 15<sup>th</sup> "EUROPE - INBO 2017" international conference in Dublin was organized around a preparatory workshop on the organization of water data management and electronic reporting, a strong challenge in the context of a balanced implementation of the water legislation and four thematic roundtables on the current issues hereafter. They provided an opportunity to exchange on progress or difficulties occurring in the implementation of the Water and Flood Directives, with a view to feeding discussions on a possible review of the WFD:

- **WFD: Toward the 2019 reviews:** the 2019 evaluation for its Review, the 3rd Basin Management Plans, and beyond,
- **Adaptation to Climate Change in basins:** Pressures, Priorities, Insurances, Impacts and Resilience of Government Organizations and Economic Sectors,
- **Stakeholder and public participation in river basin management:** Statutory Consultation for the Development of the River Basin Management Plan, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Natura 2000 Impact Assessments and Programmes of Measures and participation of sectors, volunteers, NGOs and existing networks,
- **New Emerging Environmental Issues:** Degradation of Natural Capital and Ecosystems, Emerging Contaminants and Hazardous Substances entering the Food-Chain, Non-point Source Pollution, Plastics, Hydromorphology, Alien Species.

It should be reminded that, for INBO members, the term "basin" covers the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers, either local, national or transboundary.

51 papers were presented and discussed during the conference.

A side event to the conference also took place: the workshop on the intercontinental integration (Europe - Latin America) of the ECOCUENCAS Project.

The workshop and side event outcomes were presented in a plenary session.

- **Roundtable 1: WFD: Toward the 2019 reviews**

The WFD, enacted in 2000, plans for its "review" in 2019 at the latest. The first issue in this review is the future of the Directive beyond 2027. We know now, that at this date, the objective of "good status" of water bodies will not be achieved in all basins, contrary to the requirements of the Directive. Therefore, we must question the future of the WFD at this time: should we continue with the same framework, modify certain elements of the Directive to go beyond 2027?

The impossibility of achieving the "good status of water bodies" by 2027 in spite of the efforts made to reduce the pressures of human activities on water resources and the threat of European disputes are fears shared all over Europe that lead to questions about the operational implementation of the Directive in the years to come.

Thinking about the future of water policy has already started at the level of European bodies and Member States. Nevertheless, it must accelerate, in particular by relying on experts from basin organizations.

While European law is sometimes a reason for rejecting Europe in public opinion, the review of the directive must take care of having better support from the citizens. This means having clear, accessible and appropriate objectives. This also requires recognizing and promoting the progresses made, which is not always facilitated by the "in itinere" changes in the criteria for assessing good status.

As part of this thinking, the following elements should be taken into account:

- The principles established in the WFD and its high environmental ambition are widely recognized
- The effective implementation of the WFD should be based on improving water governance at the regional level by involving all the local authorities and aiming to bridge the communication gap between the EU, Member States, the basins and the public,
- The investments already made to implement the WFD, both from the point of view of the organizations and of the actual work carried out, must be amortized and sustained, and economic studies should be systematically launched to take account of the costs of water use in order to have arguments for planning and sustainability
- The complexity of EU funding schemes should be simplified in order to allow for efficient investments according to the needs of the Member States,
- The sectoral integration of objectives, especially in the fields of agriculture, industry, soil management and the marketing of chemicals, is a challenge,
- Agriculture is the main user of water resources and the countries affected by water shortage face a quantitative problem that is not covered by the Directive; in these countries additional infrastructure is needed to ensure better management of the resource and an appropriate response to the needs,
- Technical difficulties in defining what is good status and how to report on progress and improvement of aquatic ecosystems and the one-out-all-out principle that masks progress should be reconsidered for the future of the WFD,
- It is important that the definition of good status be stable and the same for everyone in order to be able to use the exchanges of experience and give project owners a stable view of their obligations in the medium term.
- It is essential to understand that the "one out all out" principle is highly demobilizing and must therefore be reviewed.
- The challenges of climate change regarding the quantity and quality of water resources must be integrated into the WFD implementation by introducing more strongly the link between water quality, ecosystem quality and biodiversity, these latter being an asset for climate change in the basins.
- Furthermore, it is still too early to assess the effectiveness of some measures taken for resources or ecosystems

EUROPE-INBO members consider that the WFD should evolve on the basis of proven scientific advances and adopt a cautious approach in the review of the WFD while staying in line in order to avoid excessive debates, should the Directive be entirely amended. The question is how to best manage the prospect that is emerging (difficulty in achieving the objectives of good status in 2027), knowing that the WFD does not stop in 2027 and that the use of the postponement of delays becomes more difficult.

It is advisable to improve the operational conditions for implementation by both a more pragmatic approach to established objectives based on confirmed scientific data and by the inclusion of the WFD in a European water policy that facilitates integration of WFD objectives into other EU sectoral policies (agriculture, energy, transport, marketing of chemicals, etc.), the development of innovative projects, and the provision of adequate financial and technical support.

The development of information systems and their interoperability, favoured by the gradual implementation of the INSPIRE Directive, will be the key drivers of this better integration. Their improvement must lead, in particular, to a different vision of the real situation and of the challenges. In addition, the WIS must primarily work for citizens, which is not yet generally the case.

The EUROPE-INBO members have doubts about the timetable for the review of the Directive: 2019 seems too early to include the results of the evaluation of the second management plans (deadline 2021) and the possible review would happen during the ongoing third plans, and therefore only applicable after 2027.

In order to better feed the discussions with the Commission, EUROPE-INBO members are planning to involve European parliamentarians at the next meeting in 2018 during a roundtable.

While the second cycle of the management plan is under way, the preparation of the 3rd cycle for 2022-2027 must already be initiated, especially by defining the objectives to be achieved at the end of the third cycle and taking into account the evolution of the global context, i.e. the adoption by the United Nations of the Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 6 on water and the adoption of the Paris Agreement on adaptation to climate change.

The WFD review and the taking into account of these aspects in the next cycle of the management plan will provide a strong signal in this direction.

The EUROPE-INBO members should be involved in the review and examination process at the earliest stages in order to feed thoughts from their experience on the implementation of the WFD.

- **Roundtable 2 : Adaptation to Climate Change in Basins**

The COP 21, held in Paris in 2015, and the COP 22, held in 2016 in Morocco, clearly demonstrated the need to accelerate actions to take into account the effects of climate change on water resources and populations.

The Paris Pact on "Water and Adaptation to the Effects of Climate Change in the Basins of Rivers, Lakes and Aquifers" launched by INBO in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) during COP21 as part of the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA), summarizes the principles and actions to be implemented for adaptation in basins.

More than 358 basin organizations, ministries, local and national authorities, companies, donors, research and education centres, members of the civil society and international organizations from 92 countries have signed this "Pact" which has since become a part of "the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA)".

Beyond this agreement, it is now time to take action. As a follow-up to this pact and of the COP 22 held in Marrakech at the end of 2016, an inventory was made of the projects and experiences in adapting to climate change in basins. This collection will allow the sharing of knowledge and practices and, by promoting the use of a common language, will facilitate the mobilization of donors and governments for this priority issue of adapting water resources to the effects of climate change, which is now indispensable and urgent. The objective is to accelerate the implementation of actions of all kinds. Such actions are particularly relevant in countries affected by water scarcity, as resources are insufficient and are likely to be reduced due to the effects of climate change.

At the level of the European Union and generally speaking, the best possible integration between the WFD, the Flood Risk Management Directive and the Marine Strategy Directive should be sought, especially when defining climate change adaptation measures to be incorporated into the Basin Management Plans and Programme of Measures. This especially applies to Flood Risk Management Plans, drought plans and pollution control programmes. Similarly, given the development of water shortages in many regions, the European Union needs to invest more heavily in technologies and techniques to manage the demand and save water.

In addition, the future Basin Management Plans and Programmes of Measures (3rd cycle) should be conceived by integrating the pressures generated by climate change. Management Plans must therefore integrate appropriate measures in river basins to deal with the effects of climate change and other pressures such as demography, urbanization or the development of agriculture.

These adaptation measures must be based on a multisectoral approach with all economic sectors having an impact on the areas concerned, basins and sub-basins. Sectoral policies (energy, agriculture, urban planning, etc.) and the adaptation measures that concern them must also be integrated and consistent.

Every effort should be made to avoid over-exploitation of groundwater due to excessive demand. The effect of urbanization must also be measured against the increased risk. Risk analysis is a significant element to integrate into the processes, including the cascade effects. One way is to be developed in the direction of the "acceptable" risk assessment by the populations in the case of extreme climatic events.

For this purpose, it is necessary to improve water information systems to make them more effective in this regard by extending them to data on climate change. A data structuring effort is needed in this area. Similarly, the monitoring and control systems that allow correcting in real time the plans and programmes are to be consolidated, knowing the great degree of uncertainty inherent to climate change and its effects. The EUROPE-INBO members reiterated their recommendation to increase the exchanges of experiences between European countries on these aspects of integrated data management.

On this basis, a good knowledge of local vulnerability to climate change can facilitate the approach of realistic scenarios and clarify the vision of impacts on water resources and populations with a view to defining the most efficient priority actions to be undertaken in the basins and sub-basins.

The Programme of Measures should be an opportunity to deepen and even reinforce some adaptation actions already present in current programmes, bearing in mind that the issue does not arise in a single WFD cycle and that things will evolve with the evolution of knowledge on the effects of climate change. Climate change usually intensifies and extends the risks of already existing imbalances, irrespective of climate change. It will therefore always be difficult to distinguish between "historical" actions and specific adaptation actions. The challenge, however, is to analyze well whether the measures taken go beyond climate change.

This roundtable allowed taking note of the first recommendations of the EcoCuencas project whose objective is the "Consolidation of river basin management by strengthening resilience to the consequences of climate change and the development of financial redistribution mechanisms from a perspective of sustainable development in pilot basins in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru".

The EcoCuencas project is part of the European WATERCLIMA-LAC programme, namely the "Regional Programme for the Management of Basins and Coastal Areas in a Context of Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean". Its success demonstrates the importance of increasing exchanges of experiences between Europe and America using regional networks of river basin organizations (Europe-INBO and RELOB).

- **Roundtable 3: Stakeholder and public participation in river basin management**

Participants in the EUROPE-INBO Conference recalled that stakeholders' and public involvement is crucial for improving water resources management and that their information and participation in decision-making processes from the start should still be developed for greater ownership of the measures and actions included in the management plans.

Similarly, public access to monitoring results and to knowledge about water and aquatic environments, their status and evolution, is an obligation that also facilitates ownership of decisions and therefore improves the effectiveness of actions. It is also a challenge for making this access understandable and effective to the largest number of people.

Users' ownership of water-related policies and resulting measures is an inevitable passage for progress and efficiency. In particular, it enables a better understanding of the costs borne by the various categories of users and the arbitration needed for the recovery of these costs.

From the start of its implementation process, the WFD emphasized the need for public participation in water resources management and in the drafting of management plans.

Thus, a statutory consultation of the public in the development of management plans, strategic environmental assessments, Natura 2000 impact assessments and programmes of measures has been set up.

These consultations are based not only on the setting up of decision-making or consultative bodies at different local levels but also on a relevant representation of the different categories of users in these bodies. These elements are essential in a context of public participation to enhance the understanding of the challenges ahead and of the necessary efforts. It should be noted that the consultations mobilize very few water users and are often not representative of all the components of the public.

The EUROPE-INBO members stressed the importance of these participatory approaches, which should be strengthened to achieve better results in water resources management. They emphasize the need for better involvement of local communities in water resource management projects.

In this sense, the development of river committees/commissions composed of different stakeholders (elected officials, users, the State), whether their participation is voluntary, flexible, non-formalized or institutionalized and regulated, should be strongly promoted. The local stakeholders thus assembled define the objectives of joint water management and the means to achieve them.

In many countries, local, public or private contractors are responsible for implementing the measures. It is essential to ensure that they are actively involved in the WFD implementation process from the start, and in the drafting of programmes of measures.

The EUROPE-INBO members also emphasized the importance of adopting a common vision between Member States and the Commission to clarify and improve national water-related legislations. This shared vision could lead to better water governance, especially to establish partnerships between local authorities and user associations, to coordinate activities between water agencies and authorities at all levels and to adopt innovative technologies in the field of water and renewable energies.

- **Roundtable 4 : New Emerging Environmental Issues**

Improved knowledge and better measurement tools enable to show new threats to aquatic environments. These include new pollutants coming from the use of substances to protect

human, animal or plant health, new hazardous substances or micro-pollutants that are harmful to ecosystems and to water quality.

Much more difficult to control than conventional organic pollution, these pollutants are present in small quantities and therefore hard to measure. Moreover, they can enter the food chain with various harmful effects on health or the environment which at the end of the journey are detrimental to all kinds of life. This especially concerns endocrine disrupters.

This degradation of water quality is added to the well-known pollution such as accidental pollution or non-point source pollution whose causes and origins are well-defined: industry, agriculture for example.

Aquatic environments also have to deal with the development, often very quick, of invasive alien species for which the remedies are poorly understood.

Finally, river basins have to face the effects of hydromorphological change induced by human actions (river works, works on the banks, etc.).

All this inevitably leads to a degradation of the natural, environmental and ecological assets, this is why it is essential to bring water and biodiversity policies closer and to give priority to solutions given by nature itself, whenever possible.

The EUROPE-INBO members highlighted the need to take actions that are more effective and more respectful of nature to find the best remedies to this degradation of our aquatic heritage and ecosystems. In this respect, the development of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure launched by the Commission is a promising path to be followed and amplified.

- **International and regional initiatives**

The conference also examined various international cooperation initiatives for the development of IWRM and of good governance in the basins and sub-basins of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These examples show that the EU and the Member States must maintain a high level of support for solidarity with the countries of the south or neighbours of the EU and help the development of funding for access to water and sanitation in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 6 of the 2015-2030 agenda of the United Nations.

### **Report of the Preparatory Workshop on the Organization of Water Data Management and Electronic Reporting**

The aim of the workshop was to share the lessons learned from previous reporting phases, and exchange best practices and potential simplifications. The following recommendations emerged from the workshop.

- The need for stability in the reporting specifications, especially between two cycles.
- The wish to rationalize reporting, in particular by avoiding interviewing again several services on data already reported.
- The use of reporting for public information and the availability and valuation of the reported data.
- The need for early specifications.
- The need to supplement the documentation, especially the conceptual definitions.
- The need to simplify procedures and reduce the volume of data to be reported
- The need for open source tools to collect, manage and disseminate data.
- More communication between the basin and the national level so that the difficulties encountered in the reporting are seen at all levels and discussed at the European one.
- The need for traceability in the data to clarify discrepancies between sources of information.
- The need to develop interoperability to facilitate communication between information systems.

The EUROPE-INBO Members endorsed all these recommendations.

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Following the severe earthquake, which happened in Mexico, the participants in the conference wish to express their solidarity with the Mexican authorities, with INBO World President Roberto Ramirez De La Parra, Director General of CONAGUA and with the Mexican Basin Organizations.

The "EUROPE-INBO 2017" conference is a key step for assessing the WFD implementation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of River Basin Management Plans (2016-2021), but also for formulating proposals on the future of this Directive, based on the experience of the EUROPE-INBO members. It is also the opinion of the basin organizations that are one of the fundamental "stakeholders" in the implementation of the Water and Flood Directives; it enables consolidate feedbacks from the field and deduce recommendations for the future.

EUROPE-INBO members consider that efforts to implement the measures need to be increased so that all EU water bodies get closer to "good status" within a reasonable and realistic time frame in all EU countries.

They recalled the great need for better coordination between European water policy and other EU economic and sectoral policies, such as the CAP, transnational transport policy and renewable energy policy. It is important to promote this integration for the best possible economic efficiency of the available means.

The participants thanked France and especially Mr. Jean LAUNAY, for having fulfilled with determination and success the EUROPE-INBO Group presidency during the year 2016/2017.

The Presidency of the EUROPE-INBO group for the coming year until the next conference in 2018 was transferred from France to Ireland.

The delegates acknowledged with gratitude the proposal of the Spanish Authorities to organize the 16<sup>th</sup> EUROPE-INBO Conference (2018) in Seville, Spain, from 17 to 20 October 2018.

The delegates thanked the Irish Organizing Committee and, in particular, its president Mr. Ray Earl, for the perfect organization of this 15th Conference and the Irish Authorities for their excellent welcome.

### **APPROVED IN MALAHIDE-DUBLINON 23 SEPTEMER 2017**

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