



## **Euro-INBO 2021**

### **DECLARATION OF MALTA**

The members of the EuroRIOB network met from 8 to 10 December 2021 in Malta for their 19th international conference on the implementation of the European water directives.

The experience acquired in the face of the challenges of demographic growth, economic development, worsening of pollution, climate change, the fall of biodiversity, shows that basin management is a tool which has proved its effectiveness.

The participants recalled the main principles on which this management is based:

- Integrated management, on the scale of the river basin, aiming to ensure the sustainable satisfaction of the needs of the various water users and ecosystems,
- Monitoring of the effectiveness of policies based on a network of information systems to assess the situation of water bodies and the effectiveness of policies,
- Medium- and long-term planning with periodic programmes of measures allowing the implementation of cyclical management plans,
- Financing based on the specific principles of user-polluter-pays,
- Better participation of all the stakeholders in decision-making and in the implementation of actions, thanks to basin, tributary or aquifer committees or councils, associating the various levels of administrations, all categories of users, women and young people and, more generally, the general public,
- The strengthening or creation of basin authorities, agencies and organisations, whose role in the production and dissemination of information, consultation with stakeholders, planning and evaluation, as well as the financing of programmes of measures, has shown its great operational interest.

The WFD and the directives related to water (flood directive, marine environment directive, etc.) have shown over the last 20 years a recognised effectiveness, especially in terms of methodology, identification of water bodies, planning and reporting.

The participants wish to reaffirm the solidity of the experience acquired over more than 20 years, in the face of the challenges of demographic growth, economic development, worsening pollution, climate change and the decline in biodiversity, and to make the following recommendations.

- Accelerate action and continue efforts, beyond the ambitious deadline of 2027 set to achieve Good Status of Water Bodies, especially through the overall European ambition of the "Green Deal for Europe", to better deal with diffuse pollution due mainly to intensive agriculture and restore a satisfactory hydro-morphology of degraded rivers and lakes
- Better involve decentralised public authorities in the implementation of actions within their competence, and to mobilise users and the general population to achieve objectives that depend on their individual initiatives.
- Improve techniques for producing data, processing and disseminating information, in particular by using the new technologies available (innovative tools, imagery and satellite data).
- Strengthen the institutional powers and human and financial resources of authorities or agencies, including cross-border ones, and their role in consultation with the populations concerned.
- Adopt and use tools to better identify the pressures linked to water uses, the state of ecosystems, and to know the economic contribution of all categories of actors to the fair recovery of costs based on the user-polluter-pays principle.
- Use the possibilities of equalisation between Member States, geographical areas and economic sectors to facilitate financing, in particular by strengthening upstream-downstream solidarity.
- Promote River Basin Management Plans as integrating documents and tools and better coordinate the various EU sectoral policies related to water, in particular the Common Agricultural Policy, pan-European waterway transport or renewable energies, especially in the framework of the "Green Pact".
- Consider new measures to address climate change, in terms of
  - o risk zoning, prevention, protection of populations
  - o control of water demand and over-consumption
  - o recourse to alternative techniques, particularly for navigation, agricultural production, hydroelectricity and invasive species
  - o use of non-conventional resources and recycling of treated wastewater, and aquifer recharge
  - o Use of nature-based solutions.
- Provide additional financial means to implement these measures.
- Strengthen cooperation between riparian countries within the framework of the WFD and the 1992 and 1997 UN Conventions on transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers,
- Create and strengthen international commissions or organisations allowing the coordination of action plans between riparian countries for better knowledge, information sharing, improvement of dialogue, conflict prevention, by associating local authorities and users' representatives, including young people.
- Accelerate the digitisation of the water sector - in the framework of the European Commission's Digital Agenda (COM (2020) 67) and Work Programme for 2022 (COM (2021) 645) - which could offer opportunities and solutions to the WFD challenges, based on recent innovations (Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), "digital twins", the digital data space or instrumentation)

## **INVOLVEMENT OF ALL USERS |**

It is now essential to better involve all users without distinction, especially young people and women, in the preparation and implementation of action programmes. It is recommended that this association be done within the framework of committees or basin councils for rivers, lakes and aquifers, with real responsibilities.

Measures to raise the general public's awareness of current and future issues, as well as education and training, should be reinforced. The new technologies, which allow for wide-ranging communication at a distance, are an asset for involving the greatest number of people and facilitating their active participation.

The "Youth Parliament for Water" experiments have also shown their value.

## **ADAPTATION OF FUNDING |**

Given the major challenges linked to the quality and quantity of water resources on the planet, and their economic, social and environmental consequences, it is necessary to raise awareness among all the political actors in national and local authorities of the urgent need for stronger policies and funding in this field, and for better recognition and valuation of the services provided by the environment.

Through its long experience, the European Union can be a source of inspiration for many countries wishing to adapt their institutional frameworks and their water policies.

Information and consultation have a significant cost that must be included in the budgets of the action plans, to avoid this remaining wishful thinking.

## **COOPERATION |**

The European Union could further strengthen the already very important efforts made to disseminate its experience to the countries that want it.

Basin management plans must be negotiated between all the stakeholders and be based on a shared vision, in the general interest.

It is desirable that a greater number of United Nations Member States ratify the 1992 and 1997 conventions on the management of international and transboundary waters.

Basin management plans should be promoted in the international negotiations on the post-2020 global framework on biodiversity and climate change.

The "Basin Action Plan", to be approved at the 9th WWF in Dakar, should be based on these proposals and boost their implementation.

INBO and its regional networks are strategic actors for disseminating and assisting in the implementation of the principles of integrated water resource and ecosystem management at the level of basins, allowing to consider the future in terms of health and development, social and environmental, of the populations and aquatic environments.

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Malta, 10 December 2021.