

Joint Process on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube

Abstract Marieke van Nood, European Commission, DG Environment,
Unit D.2 "Protection of Water & Marine Environment"

EU Water Policy – the Water Framework Directive

Maintaining a sustainable balance between all water needs in the European Union is the aim of the **Water Framework Directive** (WFD), adopted in 2000. The Water Framework Directive establishes a legal framework to guarantee sufficient quantities of good quality water. Its key aim is to achieve "good status" for all waters by 2015.

First Implementation Results Water Framework Directive

The first implementation report of the WFD (COM(2007)128) identifies an average of 40% of surface water bodies in EU as being at risk of failing to achieve good status in 2015.

Furthermore, on average more than 20% of water bodies in the EU are provisionally identified as heavily modified and artificial. For these waterbodies, good ecological potential is the aim in stead of good ecological status.

The main reasons for such a high number of water bodies identified as 'at risk' is pollution from agriculture and hydromorphological pressures. Navigation is one of the main driving forces for these hydromorphological pressures.

Way forward

Although we should not forget the benefits of the development of the main drivers causing water degradation, there is a risk that significant water system degradation and biodiversity loss will continue in the future with infrastructure developments that are implemented without fully taking account of the EU environmental legislation.

The planning process for the establishment of river basin management plans needs to be coordinated to ultimately achieve the WFD objectives. Sectorial integration is essential, in particular with plans and programmes in the field of agriculture, rural and regional development, navigation and hydropower.

Many good examples of integrating navigation development and water protection are collected in the activity of the Common Implementation Strategy on 'WFD and Hydromorphology'¹. Furthermore, in case of new modifications, the Water Framework Directive allows surface water status deterioration provided a certain number of conditions are met². These conditions include that the beneficial objectives served can not for reasons of feasibility or disproportionate costs be achieved by other means which are a significantly better environmental option and that all practicable steps are taken to mitigate the adverse impacts. Proper application of this provision is key to integrating future navigation developments and water protection.

¹ See http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/env/wfd/library?l=/framework_directive/thematic_documents/hydromorphology&vm=detailed&sb=Title

² Further guidance on this provision, article 4.7, can be found at http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/env/wfd/library?l=/framework_directive/thematic_documents/environmental_objectives&vm=detailed&sb=Title