



**RESEAU INTERNATIONAL DES ORGANISMES DE BASSIN  
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF BASIN ORGANIZATIONS  
RED INTERNACIONAL DE ORGANISMOS DE CUENCA  
Международная сеть водохозяйственных организаций**

**Common Implementation Strategy of the Water Framework Directive  
Meeting of Water Directors, 24 & 25 November 2008**

**Report of the International Network of Basin Organizations to Water Directors:  
« WFD contributions to water management in transboundary river basins:  
progress report and needs identified by the basin organizations »**

20 November 2008

## **SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

The International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), created in 1994, aims at facilitating **operational exchanges among basin organizations** which are directly responsible for the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at river basin level. INBO is currently present all around the world, with 188 members in 68 countries. INBO could be considered as “**the voice of basin organizations**”.

In Europe, the **EUROPE-INBO Group for WFD implementation** was created in 2003 to enable Basin Organizations and District Authorities to meet regularly in an informal way and exchange their practical experience. The work of the Group aims at enriching the WFD Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) by identifying operational problems and making field-oriented proposals. It also allows disseminating WFD concepts and learned lessons to **non-EU countries**.

In Europe, INBO relies also on two regional networks, which are also members of the SCG:

- the Central and Eastern European Network of Basin Organizations (**CEENBO**);
- the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (**MENBO**).

There are many transboundary river basins and aquifers in Europe and almost all the countries are concerned. All kinds of coordination exist, from bilateral co-operation to the involvement of 19 countries for the Danube, which is the most international basin in the world.

Among the 110 river basin districts established across the EU, 40 are international river basin districts and cover more than 60% of the territory of the EU, making the international coordination one of the most significant issue and challenge for the WFD implementation.

However, the specific transboundary issues of WFD have not been so much analysed; that is why INBO wished to give a contribution on this topic in the CIS process. A report was prepared with the goal to present, from the angle of the basin organizations, a view on the implementation stage at transboundary level, to evidence what goes well and, on the contrary, what makes difficulties, and to identify the needs and recommendations of the basin organizations.

This report has been discussed during the 2008 EUROPE-INBO “International Conference on WFD implementation” which was held in Sibiu, Romania, 1-3 October 2008. The Presidency of EUROPE-INBO Group is handled by Romania for the year to come.

This document is a summary of the complete report, which is available on CIRCA and on the INBO Website [www.riob.org](http://www.riob.org).

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For the first time in history, 29 countries in Europe (the 27 EU countries + Switzerland and Norway) were committed to implement WFD and jointly manage their water resources at river basin level, being national or transboundary basins, which represents **an unequalled effort for good governance at this scale.**

The WFD allows the **dissemination of river basin management concept all over Europe.** The progress is particularly important for transboundary basins, since the WFD explicitly requires **delimiting international river basin districts** and coordinating characterisations, management plans, programmes of measures and public participation between the concerned Member States.

**Big progress occurred where legal and institutional frameworks were established**

- Building on a long tradition of transboundary cooperation, the WFD has brought **real added value** in European transboundary basins : firstly by **delimitating international river basin districts** within which riparian countries share a **joint responsibility** for the management of the river basin, secondly by allowing **considering the whole river basin and therefore all the riparian States** (involving countries which were not yet represented in the agreements or in the international commissions) including our new **neighbours in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.**
- The positive **role of international commissions** was strongly underlined, as **platform for international coordination.** Real progress in the WFD implementation in transboundary basins is facilitated when there are already established legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary co-operation, starting with **agreements** and then setting up of **International Commissions and Secretariat.**
- **The WFD led to amend or supplement the existing international agreements,** in order to make them comply with the new WFD concepts or obligations such as for example, the **objective of good ecological status, the development of coordinated management plans and programmes of measures,** the coordination for floods/droughts prevention and control, etc. The WFD also led to **new bilateral agreements** in Eastern Europe.
- It increases exchange of information and coordination between riparian States, **improving upstream/downstream political and technical relationships,** allowing to **overcome cultural differences and language barrier,** thus contributing to **European integration.**
- WFD was a driving force for new Member States and is now a driving force for non-EU riparian countries (EECCA region) and also outside EU (Latin America, Africa).
- The WFD provides a **common working framework** (objectives, methods, deadlines, reference conditions, planning documents), with CIS guidance documents as common base for implementation.
- International Commissions act as **platform for international coordination,** supporting **harmonisation of practices, decisions through consensus** and prevention of conflicts, **information exchange,** etc between riparian countries.
- Most International Commissions have set up a **WFD co-ordination group** and **thematic working groups** where **experts from Member States exchange views and contribute to the work.** This common work is formalised in a **roof report, common to the whole international district,** and annexes with the reports of each national part.

### **Some visible achievements but to be deepened**

- A huge work has been done in the field of **monitoring and sharing of data**, to fulfil the WFD requirements on characterisation in 2004 and monitoring in 2006. INBO strongly supports an increase in co-ordination of information systems: **consistency of water monitoring, observation and information systems, harmonisation of data and GISs, use of common models, are essential for sharing knowledge and following-up actions in transboundary basins.**
- There is also a need for standardization of cartography. Maps on the scale of a international river basin district are also required. However the projection systems or cartography are generally quite different from one country to another.
- Management Plans of International River Basin Districts (IRBD) are under preparation but they may often look like a **patchwork of national elements**, as each Member State remains responsible vis-à-vis the Commission for the WFD implementation in its national part of the international district. It is rather the sum of national plans, but more coordinated as before, which is already a progress!
- It is now clear that the practical implementation necessitates **the involvement of local politico-administrative stakeholders** (municipalities, provinces, counties...) **who will be front-liners for the investments** and functioning of water utilities. They will be in charge of the concrete implementation with all economic interested parties (farmers, industrialists, fishermen, tourism...).
- Deadline of 2015 will come quickly and we have **still uncertainties about real efficiency of certain measures**; it is then urgent to **launch right now the measures for which there are no more debates**, without waiting for the formal adoption of the RBMP end of 2009.
- A **true mobilization concerning agriculture** is compulsory to achieve objective of good status; as well **transboundary management of aquifers** needs to be strengthened to make for lost time.
- WFD gives a major role to the **economic analysis which remains to be improved**. It is very important to exchange on criteria for disproportionate costs. INBO is considering the creation of an internal working group on economic analysis to share information between basin organizations in view of **a more common approach of exemptions and extension of delays.**

### **Constraints and needs highlighted by the concerned basin organizations**

- A huge work load: carrying out of national implementation and international co-ordination at the same time, complex decision-making process within international commissions, harmonisation of approaches and methods, several working languages  
→ **Additional human/financial resources are necessary for basin organizations !**
- A need for capacity building: need to share transboundary management practical experiences, need to build a common culture  
→ **Launching joint training programmes for the concerned managers would be valuable !**
- A need for increasing the means and actions of international commissions: practical problems, heaviness of decision-making, but added value and benefits of international commissions  
→ **Improve the working methods and decision-making process within international commissions, support the creation of new ones and strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries !**

- A need for strengthening co-ordination of actions: need for coherence of actions within the whole IRBD, need for reinforcing the coordinated development of management plans and programmes of measures

→ **Give more ambition to the roof report and take common / more closer measures !**

- A need for a better exchange of data, information and know-how especially concerning prevention and management of floods and droughts, implementing an upstream-downstream common cause and a joint responsibility

→ **Coordinate warning networks, share information and know-how, elaborate floods/droughts management plans at the level of transboundary basins**

- The need to anticipate climate change

→ **Prevention and adaptation measures must be integrated from now in management plans and programmes of measures; the anticipation of climate change is even more important in the case of transboundary basins !**

- A need for a joint management of transboundary aquifers: fragility of aquifers and time needed for restoring degraded situations, problems of coherence in the delimitation of groundwater bodies on both sides, lack of knowledge and lack of knowledge transfer ...

→ **Urgently develop specific agreements or systematically extend the existing ones on surface water to groundwater !**

- Need for a real participation at transboundary level: develop the role of international commissions, reinforce the NGO' participation, coordinate not only the process and timetable but also the content of the consultation

→ **Draw a joint strategy for public participation and develop the feeling of membership and identity at the IRBD scale !**

- Need of supporting relations with non-EU Member States (to create basin organizations, international commissions, implement basin management,...)

→ **Reinforce cooperation programmes and support twinning agreements for the basins shared with non-EU countries** (Mediterranean countries, EECCA countries).

This last point must be strongly underlined since the objective of good status might not be achieved in transboundary basins on account of the lack of capacity of the riparian non-EU Member States. EU countries will do as much as possible, but they will be **limited by what the non-EU riparian countries will be able to do** to reduce pollution, improve hydromorphology, etc. Joint implementation of WFD with non-EU countries and investment in capacity building of those countries **must be a major issue of concern for EU Member States.**

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In conclusion, the WFD is a successful example of regional initiative which **can inspire other areas in the world** as it seems to be a factor for disseminating the principles of good governance. The WFD cannot be exported as a regulatory tool but **its approach and principles are transferable**, such as: characterisation of initial status and development of monitoring, formulation of management plans at basin level, definition of deadlines and measurable objectives, agreed indicators and common reference frames for data management, introduction of the cost recovery principle, participation of the interested parties and of the public...

It can be an effective complement to the work of the **UNECE Water Convention** which, since its adoption in 1992, has enabled the establishment of several bilateral or multilateral agreements between European countries but also between EU and non-EU countries.

**INBO will continue its efforts to support exchange of fruitful experience on WFD implementation for all interested basin organizations in Europe and Neighbouring Countries, as well as at international level.**