

Restoring Europe's Rivers

RESTORE Brussels Policy Workshop – Debating the challenges of river restoration Scheldt River, 27th June 2013

RESTORE outputs and findings

Martin Janes of the River Restoration Centre introduced the resources and activities of RESTORE:

- RESTORE project [website](#) provides resources, key publications, and 'how to' guidance
- [River Wiki](#) of over 400 case studies
- [River Restoration Conference](#), 11-13 September, Vienna, Austria

Jenny Mant of the River Restoration Centre discussed the policy-related findings of RESTORE. After three years and more than 30 events, what is needed for better delivery on the ground and integration at the European and national levels from the perspective of practitioners and basin planners?

Better rivers call for:

- A **collation of evidence** to demonstrate achievements of river restoration
- **Economic assessments** that lead to delivery
- Greater European level **policy integration** that accounts for catchment approaches
- Better **links between water and land management** such as climate change adaptation/mitigation and EU rural funds

Discussion of issues requiring an integrated approach

- **Hydropower and fish passage.** Management by different agencies is currently problematic. Discussion focused on the need to develop win-win solutions to connect ecological policies with economic development that is sustainable. State of the art knowledge and partnerships are needed to develop hydropower while improving the ecological status of rivers
- **Small hydropower opportunity** is a growing issue and that is problematic under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). There is a negative influence on ecosystems and good ecological status
- How can **guidance be provided to Member States (MS)** to provide connections between different policies, in particular the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)? This is a matter of urgency in order to ensure the best use of the 'greening' of the CAP. All stakeholders are needed in river basins, and farmers have a large impact on what happens upstream in terms of ecological status. What type of guidance or measure can be provided?
- **Structural funds** currently spent on hard flood defenses such as concrete walls. Going forward, there is a desire to see funds available for **green infrastructure**. Guidance would be helpful, what type of guidance is therefore needed?
- An integrated approach is needed between **Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Floods Directive (FD)**

Ideas for taking a more integrated approach forward

- The European Commission (EC) is currently negotiating partnership agreements with MS for funds. Some guidance and information exists bringing attention to natural flood risk management – including green infrastructure and Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM) – but concede more work is needed

- A workshop on water and agriculture for MS was held earlier this year. There is a working group on agriculture in the newly issued WFD CIS work programme
- Further NWRM guidance and funding opportunities will be considered by the EC
- Regarding River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), rural funds were not widely used in the 1st cycle. For both the 2nd cycle of RBMPs and Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs), it is hoped that these funds are utilised. The European Centre for River Restoration (ECRR) has offered to help distribute this information
- The European Water Partnership has developed a tool to implement the WFD. By showing all stakeholders (urban, industrial, agricultural) the economic, social and ecological benefits, they are changing attitudes and increasing support to take up implementation
- In the UK, the adoption of a catchment based approach and partnerships with catchment groups such as NGOs is helping to deliver and implement the WFD

Transnational approach to river restoration

A snapshot of **current river restoration in Europe**: focused in the north and west of Europe and, on the whole, tend towards single issues/directives as opposed to the broader landscape scale. Government (in UK at least) is only just catching up with the idea of the catchment based approach. Two presentations highlighted the management benefits gained from a transnational approach, such as knowledge sharing and learning and the joint responsibility for monitoring, modeling and maintenance:

In the **Scheldt River Basin**, the Flemish Water Agency presented an INTERREG project ([ScaldWIN](#)) for interregional cooperation to help achieve better surface and groundwater quality by implementing transnational actions. The river has a high intensity of use for transport, agriculture and industry, with many heavily modified water bodies and a high number of exemptions from the WFD.

INTERREG is highly suitable to water projects such as this one due to the transnational aspects, while both INTERREG and LIFE+ projects are valuable for communicating due to their large scale – ECRR and RESTORE make this information available.

As presented by Wolfgang Salzer, the **Danube** is the 2nd largest river in Europe, flowing through 19 countries, 14 members of whom are members of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube (ICPDR). **The significant water management issues are hydropower, flood protection and navigation.** Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, transboundary cooperation for monitoring, feasibility studies and the development of a legal framework have all had a positive impact on water/environmental management. Important to the success of the ICPDR and the protection of the Danube is the cooperation with NGOs, including stakeholders from hydropower and WWF.

Taking policy forward as an agent of change for river restoration

Chris Baker of Wetlands International led a discussion on how EU policies can better support river restoration. What will make the most difference in getting river restoration into the mainstream? The ideas will be taken up in the Vienna conference and then back to the EC in the form of the RESTORE Layman's Report with concrete recommendations.

Challenges identified at the outset, include how to:

- bring in socio-economic valuation and ecosystems into mainstream development
- finance large scale, multi benefit projects
- make restoration more than something that's nice to do but not required
- scale up

The soft policies developed in the past year are the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's waters and green infrastructure communication. They advise and provide guidance and ask MS to take things under consideration. Policy considerations from discussion:

- The main policy momentum for river restoration is implementation of FD and WFD
- FRMP and RBMP offer opportunities to incorporate natural approaches, nature and biodiversity policies do as well
- CIS WFD work programme will address some of these issues, including links to agriculture, the Blueprint and green infrastructure
- CIS WFD work programme will also implement NWRM along with guidance and tools for integration with RBMP and FD

Key points from discussion on floods, making more room for rivers and raising awareness

- The time for commitments at the political level is now with the recent backdrop of European floods
- The challenge is a change in thinking, moving away from building a wall – a visible solution that gives the outward appearance of direct action to protect people – to making room for a river.
- Ecosystem services approach needs further development to demonstrate the multiple benefits of more sustainable approaches
- One suggestion being undertaken in the Netherlands is to create an inventory of costs; figuring out the policy advantages to building space for rivers. On the Meuse River many people willing to live unprotected due to increased property values
- Making agreements (contracts) with farmers is a possibility, once in every so many years
- Financing - the property needed to make room for a river belongs to someone
- Raising awareness so that politicians follow is critical. In Wallonia there is a lack of understanding as to what causes flooding, whereas strong support for nature in Austria translates to good awareness-raising by NGOs
- Resources that already exist (e.g. RESTORE wiki) can be useful in providing this evidence base but the information needs to be extracted from a database and turned into stories and training materials and disseminated

Summary of key needs for a more integrated approach to land and water management:

- **Guidance**/help to successfully implement policy on the ground is needed – e.g. CAP, green infrastructure
- **Transnational co-operation** (on shared problems and cross border water bodies) and co-operation with **NGO's**, will help deliver policy on a larger scale
- More **integrated** approaches to management based on **making room for rivers** and consider the **whole catchment** (land and water policy areas) are needed
- Better awareness, enhanced knowledge and more certain evidence on costs and benefits
- Better use/development of the resources that are available would be beneficial – e.g. development of the **evidence base** and incorporation of PES into mainstream funding
- Developing the **economic and political** case for river restoration needs to be a focus
- Figuring out implementation barriers and how to better absorb funding

