

ECRR welcomes European Commission's river restoration target of the Biodiversity Strategy 2030

On 20th of May, the European Commission published the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 'Bringing nature back into our lives'. The Strategy put forward new commitments for nature restoration, including freshwater ecosystems. The European Commission states that in order to achieve the objectives of the Water Framework Directive, the natural functions of rivers must be restored. The Commission aims to do this by restoring at least 25,000 km of rivers into free-flowing rivers through the removal of primarily obsolete barriers and the restoration of floodplains and wetlands.

The ECRR is excited to see that freshwater ecosystems are one of the flagship ecosystems in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The adoption of the Strategy will help address previous fragmentation between nature protection and water management. River restoration improves the ecological status and resilience of river systems and provides the framework for the sustainable multifunctional use of estuaries, rivers and streams. River restoration is an integral part of sustainable water management encompassing a large variety of ecological, physical, spatial and management measures and practices. Obsolete structures and those with limited use for society act as a barrier for water, sediment and river biology and their removal is a nature-based solution to restore local river morphology, resulting in a return to natural functioning for sediment dynamics and river wildlife. No other mitigation measures, for example fish passes, can do this. Removal leads to the rapid restoration of fauna and flora that have been suppressed since the structures in question were first built.

The [ECRR](#) is the network to promote and build capacity for ecological river restoration across Europe (see annex A), supporting the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), Floods Directive and the Convention on Biodiversity, as well as national policies. According to the ECRR, dam and barrier removal should, as a restoration measure, be integrated into the national River Basin Management Plans. National strategies, policies and planning should therefore include:

- Development of an action plan to prioritise removal of dams that are obsolete or have insignificant benefits to society;
- Redirection of finances to make funds available for barrier removal in the 3rd River Basin Management Plans;
- Deliver status reports on the progress of dam and barrier removal, including presenting the positive benefits of removals.

In 2020, the ECRR will give strategic priority to river continuity restoration, recognizing the importance of free-flowing freshwater ecosystems, based on a considerable body of evidence and realised benefits. The starting point will be a Europe-wide survey on the availability of national policies, principles, plans, and best practices of river continuity and natural process restoration. The ECRR is confident that this body of work will support the European Commission and the Member States in achieving the target of 25,000 km restored free-flowing rivers.

Annex A: ECRR's Rationale and Approach

ECRR represents organisations¹ and initiatives with an interest European Water Policy and related practice. The ECRR is an independent Association, free to voice opinions, irrespective of the interests of partners and supporters.

Our viewpoint is that the conservation and restoration of rivers, and their related riparian zones, wetland and floodplain ecosystems and the services they provide, is essential to mankind's health, wellbeing and prosperity. River restoration is a green infrastructure approach increasingly used in resolving river management challenges in many parts of Europe. It is a broad ecological approach and often covers other evolving EU policies and strategies such as Natural Water Retention Measures (particularly fluvial flooding) and Nature-Based Solutions (working with nature in urban and rural development).

The ECRR defines river restoration as:

"Restoring towards the natural state and functioning of the river and the riverine environment, by assisting the recovery of river ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged or destroyed. River restoration promotes the sustainable multifunctional use of rivers to benefit society."

Planning and implementation of river restoration at the national strategic and local delivery scales is varied across Europe, in its robustness, use of evidence and availability of experienced practitioners. There is a pressing need to build capacity (nationally) and knowledge exchange (internationally) to meet the need of legislative requirements through accepted, and by developing, best practice. The purpose of the Association is: *to encourage and support ecological river restoration throughout greater Europe.*

ECRR's role is as a knowledge network and as a catalyst for enabling continual improvement.

"The network for best practice river restoration in greater Europe."

Achieved by:

- Connecting people and organisations working on river restoration and management.
- Supporting the development of best practices of river restoration and management.
- Exchanging information about river restoration.

For the ECRR the launch of the EU Biodiversity 2030 is an important opportunity to highlight that river restoration brings future proof river ecosystems that serve all who are dependent on healthy and safe water. River restoration refers to a large variety of ecological, physical, spatial and management measures and practices that aim to restore the natural state and functioning of river systems. Restoring rivers reconnects ecosystems and the services they provide, including: water quality, biodiversity and habitats, flood safety and green infrastructure. By restoring natural conditions, river restoration promotes healthier, more resilient ecosystems that support a wide range of ecosystem services.

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¹ Finnish Environment Institute, French Agency for Biodiversity, Global Water Partnership Central and East European Countries, Iberian River Restoration Centre, International Network of Basin Organisations, Italian River Restoration Centre, Netherlands Foundation for Applied Water Research STOWA, Norwegian Environment Agency, Russian Institute of Integrated Water Management and Problems, Swedish Agency for Marine and Waters Management, The UK River Restoration Centre, Ukrainian Institute of Water Problems and Land Reclamation, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Wetlands International European Association.