

International Commission for the Protection of the Meuse River

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION OF NAMUR

On 19 March 1999, in connection with World Water Day on 22 March 1999, the Ministers of France, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Region and the Netherlands, all having responsibility for the protection of the quality of the Meuse, held their first Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Meuse River in Namur.

On this occasion, they confirmed their desire to continue to work together, in a spirit of good neighbourliness, to improve the quality of the Meuse, within the framework of the Charleville-Mézières International Agreement.

They are striving, each in its own area, to put in place integrated management and to combine their efforts to ensure common conditions for the sustainable development of the Meuse and its catchment area.

Firstly, they noted that each country, each region, individually, is making significant efforts, both in terms of regulations and funding and to operational level, to reduce water pollution; positive results regarding the quality of the Meuse River have already been recognised.

The Ministers welcome the adoption of the "Meuse" Action Programme, approved at the Plenary Assembly of 10 March 1998 and the start of its concrete implementation and the activities already carried out. In particular, they note that:

- water quality is continuously monitored and assessed by the five Parties through the network of homogeneous measurements of the Meuse stretching over the entire course of the river;
- the International Alert and Warning System "Meuse" is now operational and enables each Party to intervene more rapidly in the event of an accident or disaster;
- the Parties share their experiences on quality aspects, pollution sources, treatment measures and best available techniques;
- Furthermore, the approach to the sediment issue has led to a concrete proposal for a major LIFE project.

They confirm the specific objectives relating to the first phase of the Action Programme which concern the maintenance and improvement of both the physico-chemical and ecological quality of the Meuse.

The Ministers are pleased to note that the various Parties have already included the elements of the Meuse Action Programme into their water management strategies, each as far as it is concerned.

The Commission will present an interim report in 2000 on the progress of the implementation of the first phase and the preparation of the second phase of the Action Programme with a view to a possible adaptation of the same programme.

They call on the delegations to assess the pollution load of the Meuse from diffuse sources and to formulate joint actions to this effect to reduce these loads by joint actions.

In 2003, the Commission will draw up an overall assessment report, with particular reference to the OSPARCOM Treaty, as foreseen in the Action Programme.

The Parties will set common objectives for the Meuse to be achieved by 2010.

These will be based in particular on the results of work aimed at the return of salmon to the Meuse.

An ICPMR website will be opened soon and will allow the public to be informed of the work of the ICPMR.

Bearing in mind the guiding principles contained in the current text of the draft European Directive on the "Framework for Community Action in the Field of Water Policy", the Ministers underline the interest of the draft Directive for the Meuse River Basin and the

ICPMR and instruct the ICPMR to study the implications of this draft Directive at the level of the Meuse River basin.

Given the relationship between the management of ecological values and the management of floods in the Meuse, the Ministers consider that there is a need for close collaboration between the ICPMR and the Transnational Working Group "Floods in the Meuse", as expressed in the Namur Declaration of 8 April 1998 of the Ministers responsible for flood control in France, Wallonia, Flanders and the Netherlands, in particular by carrying out, if possible, joint actions and studies at the crossroads of the respective mandates of the ICPMR and the WGFM.

Ministers entrust the ICPMR to study the implications of the possible establishment of co-ordination on transboundary groundwater protection.

Ministers invite the Federal Republic of Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to strengthen their co-operation with the ICPMR through active participation in the work of the ICPMR Plenary Assembly, Working Groups and Sub-Groups.

Finally, irrespective of the fact that NGO representatives are already participating in the work of the ICPMR as members of some delegations, the Ministers underlined the importance of a good exchange of information and consultation with NGOs active in areas relevant to the tasks of the ICPMR.

They noted that under the provisions of the Agreement, observer status cannot be granted to interested NGOs.

They decide to invite the latter to participate, in an advisory capacity, in the work of the ICPMR Plenary Assembly, for the subjects concerning their activities.

They instruct the ICPMR to propose to the next Plenary Assembly the conditions and practical arrangements for such participation.