

Presidency summary of Informal Environment Council (Maastricht, 18 July 2004) on the Communication Flood Risk Management

Recent floods, in particular the floods of August 2002, caused many casualties, made thousands of people homeless and caused damage amounting to several thousand million Euros.

At the Informal Environment Council in the Netherlands (July 18th) the Communication from the Commission on flood risk management was discussed.

The Presidency thanks the European Commission for drafting this Communication which includes an inventory of what is already being done at the European level and which offers perspective to the future.

The Presidency appreciates the valuable work done by the European Water directors in composing the Best Practices Document.

The Presidency also thanks the Member States for their contributions in the debate during the Informal Environment Council meeting on July 18th.

Based on the discussion, on the Communication, the Dutch Presidency reached the following conclusions:

- There is common understanding between the EU Member States and the European Commission that flood risk management is an important European issue. We recognize the fact that floods have the potential to undermine the drive of the European Union towards sustainable development and compromise the EU competitiveness. Flood events can cause major damage to health, economy and environment. A common European approach would increase our resilience to flooding catastrophes. We acknowledge the actions ongoing or planned at the European, national, regional and international levels.
An European strategy, based on an integrated approach, would give us common guidelines for flood risk management in order to improve the level of protection. The result will be reduction of the potential risks for people, property and possessions in Europe.
- There is common understanding between the EU Member States and the European Commission about working collectively on the improvement of flood prevention, protection and mitigation in Europe.
The meeting regards developing and implementing a concerted European Action Programme on integrated flood prevention, protection and mitigation as the most effective way to get a common approach. This Action Programme will be the starting point for further concerted action in Europe.
- With this Action Programme the Member States should commit themselves to work together to develop and implement flood risk management plans and flood risk maps for affected river basins and coastal areas. Guidelines for the flood risk management plans and flood risk maps will be included in this Action Programme. The European Commission will facilitate coordination and information exchange, and will come forward with further proposals if necessary and will carry out research on flood related issues. The Commission will also ensure that all relevant EU policies contribute, where appropriate, to flood protection.
- Different types of floods according to the different regional characteristics are recognized. Therefore different measures are required to reduce their likelihood and impact. A regional approach towards flood risk management is necessary. Therefore we agree flood risk management plans should be developed and implemented at the level of river basins and coastal areas.

- The Presidency concludes that in developing flood risk management plans the following issues/principles should be considered:
 - The solidarity principle: measures taken in one area should not have a significant negative effect on another (upstream or downstream) area.
 - An interdisciplinary approach in which all relevant aspects of water management, spatial planning, land use, agriculture, transport and urban development and nature conservation are taken into account.
 - The integration with the river basin management plans and programmes of measures developed in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and the possibility of developing risk management plans for coastal areas within the same time frame as far as possible.
 - A long term strategic approach, including developments that are expected in the long term.
 - All elements of flood risk management should be covered in the flood risk management plans: prevention, protection, preparedness, emergency response, recovery and evaluation (lessons learned);
 - A continuing research regarding flood risk management.

The Presidency is aiming for Council Conclusions to be adopted in one of the Environmental Councils during the Dutch Presidency.

In the next few months the Dutch Presidency would like to discuss together with Member States the possibilities for further elaborating this European Action Programme. The Presidency expects a constructive contribution from all member states. The different interests will be taken into account.