

## PUBLICATION

Report  
EU  
Coastal + Marine  
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Water

# Public Participation: Contributing to Better Water Management

## EXPERIENCES FROM EIGHT CASE STUDIES ACROSS EUROPE



European Environment Agency [1]

By promoting transparency and ensuring inclusive, public participation can enhance water management

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As part of its work under the European Topic Centre on Inland, Coastal, and Marine waters (ETC/ICM), Ecologic Institute supported the European Environment Agency (EEA) in an assessment of public participation processes in the context of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). This resulted in a report covering theoretical aspects of public participation as well as an analysis of eight case studies from across the EU. The report was reviewed by a series of WFD experts from various EU Member States. The article is available for download.

Article 14 of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires Member States to “encourage the active involvement of all interested parties” as part of the directive’s implementation. In this light, public participation is viewed as a means of improving water management as it can strengthen the knowledge base for planning and decision-making. Members of the public, as well as organized stakeholders, should be provided with information, consulted and finally invited to contribute actively to the discussion. The active involvement of all interested parties in decision-making processes is

generally expected to foster an environment of accessibility, receptiveness and mutual respect that ultimately promotes transparency and trust among participants. Such a context can then increase the success rate of policies due to better acceptance by stakeholders. Naturally, this kind of setting is highly desirable, especially when the topic under discussion is a cross-cutting issue involving multiple stakeholders and reflecting numerous interests.

While the concept of public participation is now well established, its effectiveness in achieving European water-policy goals is still under assessment. The report “Public participation: contributing to better water management” addresses the fundamental question of how public participation can enhance water-related EU policies in general, and more specifically, support the development of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and implementation of the WFD. The report thereby considers the following themes of public participation in the context of the WFD:

- objectives (improving water management, raising awareness and strengthening commitment) and core principles (openness, protection of core values, speed and substance)
- actors involved in the implementation of participatory processes (covering issues of mutual benefits and trade-offs)
- governance of participatory processes and the role of stakeholders (covering issues of scale, planning and scheduling)
- the methods used to engage stakeholders and members of the public, and their effectiveness in promoting social learning

In addition to the theoretical considerations, eight different participation processes from France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK were analyzed. These case studies were selected to highlight varied and interesting examples of participation approaches and contexts. To identify 'good' and 'successful' public participation in the case studies, three evaluation criteria were used: process of participation, intermediary outcomes and actual impacts. A breakdown of these criteria into specific categories and sub-categories was developed for the analyses. The main analysis of the case studies was prepared by Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP) and Milieu Ltd. under a separate service contract.

The review of the eight case studies showed inter alia that the institutional set-up and the links between natural and administrative boundaries can influence the effectiveness of participatory processes. These elements should therefore be carefully considered and factored in, in order to develop and implement RBMPs effectively. The initiatives identified in the case studies showed that involving organized stakeholders is as important for a good planning process as is the involvement of the

wider public. However in some cases the involvement of the latter is even more challenging and needs appropriate tools and incentives. The report notes that it would be useful to look further afield for good practices and innovative approaches for the involvement of members of the public in participatory processes.

### Attachments

-  Public participation: contributing to better water management

### Main Link

Public participation: contributing to better water management [pdf, 1.2 MB, English]

### Ecologic Related Articles

- Public Participation and the European Water Framework Directive (HarmoniCOP)
- Public and Stakeholder Consultation of the Blueprint to safeguard Europe's Water

### Further Links

- EEA website: River basin management relies on effective public participation
- EEA website: Public participation: contributing to better water management

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Case study: Rhône Méditerranée River Basin Management Plans, France  
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Case study: Tidal Thames Catchment Pilot, United Kingdom  
Case study: Warta River, Poznań, Poland  
Case study: Stakeholder participation in Thuringia, Germany  
Case study: Northern Portugal RBMPs, Portugal  
Case study: Matarraña River Contract, Spain  
Case study: Flood control in the Tisza River Basin, Hungary  
Annex 2 Criteria to evaluate public participation in the context of WFD implementation  
Annex 3 Case study working template

## Keywords

Water Framework Directive, WFD, Article 14, public participation, objectives of public participation, core principles of public participation, openness, transparency, protection of core values, speed, substance, participation requirements, stakeholder involvement, water management, water governance, European water policies, WFD implementation, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, case study

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## Links

[1] <https://www.ecologic.eu/sites/files/presentation/2014/cover-eea-03-2014-water-management-8-case-studies.jpg>