







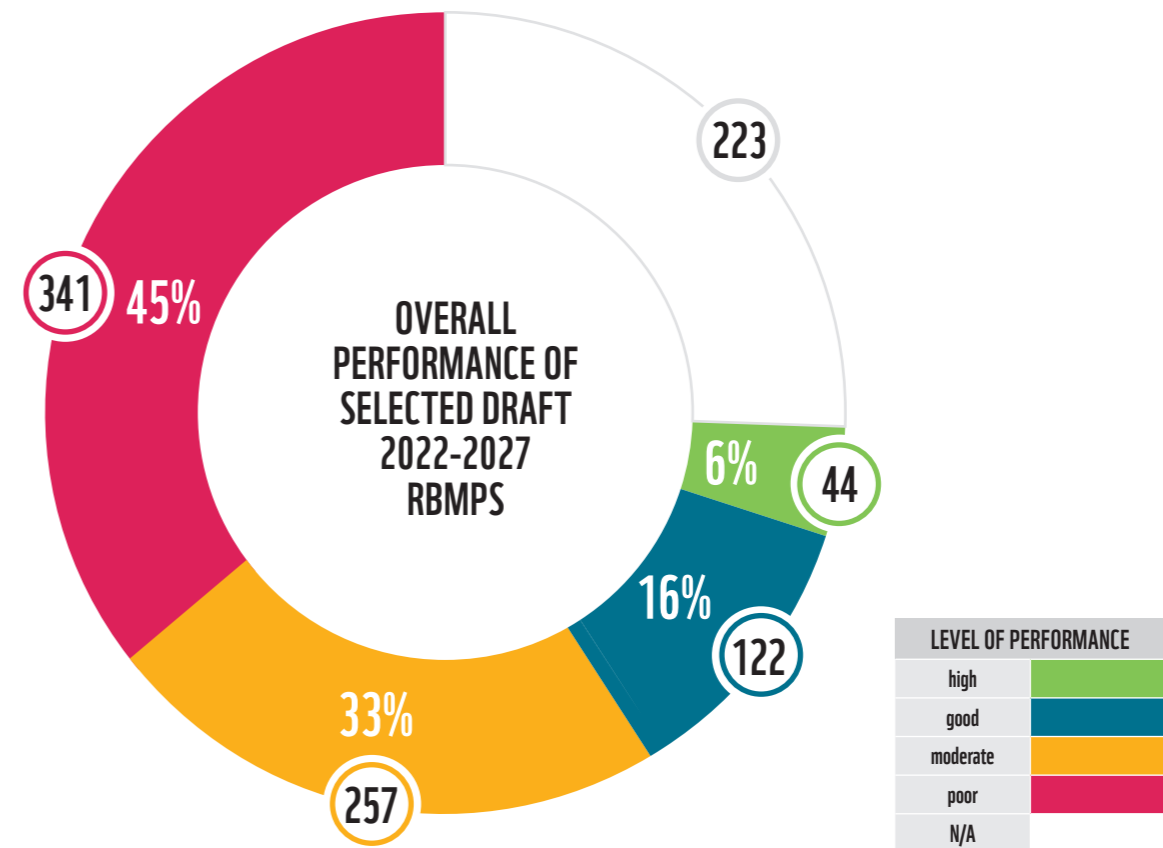
**Table 1:** Overview of the performance of selected draft RBMPs on indicators assessing key topics, weighted according to the topic's relevance. Draft RBMPs show far too little ambition, i.e. they do not contain enough measures that will help achieve the WFD objectives by 2027. The in-depth analysis of indicators aims to provide concrete recommendations to the relevant EU Member States' authorities and the European Commission.

Topic	AT	BE	DE	NEW		ES	FI	FR	INT	IT	NL	NEW	PL	NEW	RO	NEW	SK					
	Danube	Scheldt and Meuse	Elbe	Rhine	Duero	Ebro	Guadalquivir	Guadiana	Kemijoki	Vuoksi	Loire	Odra	S.Apenn.	E.Alps	Rhine	Odra	Vistula	DDDC	Jiu	Danube	Vistula	
1	Removal and adaptation of barriers																					
2	Hydropower																					
3	Inland navigation																					
4	Freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration and NBS																					
5	Water allocation and abstraction control																					
6a	Drought management																					
6b	Flood management																					
7	Agriculture																					
8	Coal mines (and combustion)																					
9	Economic instruments and adequacy of budget																					
10	Exemptions																					
11	Review and update on the implementation of the previous RBMP																					

**Table 2:** Colours codes used in this report, showing both performance on a certain issue and that issue's relevance to the River Basin District in question

RELEVANCE	Issue	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE				
		high	good	moderate	poor	N/A
	Not applicable or relevant for the RBD					
	This problem/ challenge has already been solved in the second RBMP					
	One of the many problems/challenges in this RBD					
	One of the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI)					
	The main problem/challenge in this RBD					

**Figure 2:** Overall performance of selected draft 2022-2027 RBMPs on the 47 indicators (in number of indicator values and %).



For only one fifth of the overall 732 assessed indicator values, the performance of the assessed draft RBMPs rates good or high: 6% ranked high, 16% good, 33% moderate and 45% poor – almost half of the assessed indicator values. The remaining indicator values have not been assessed, either because the topic is not relevant for the RBD or due to a lack of time and available expertise (Figure 2).

Almost all assessed draft RBMPs fail to properly address water allocation and abstraction control. Inventories and details on permit reviews for abstractions, and on controls are limited (although Slovakia and Spain are positive examples in this case) which is particularly worrying as climate change is likely to lead to larger water abstractions across the EU.

While carrying out this assessment, several irregularities in the RBMP elaboration process came to light.

**Firstly, the assessed draft RBMPs contain major gaps in information, in particular on the summary of the implementation of the previous RBMPs' Programme of Measures, the number of exemptions, and the budget.** This hampers proper public participation and the ability of civil society to provide comments on the draft plans.

**Secondly, at the time of writing this report (mid-May 2021), significant delays in the publication of the draft plans were observed.** In particular, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, partly Spain, and the UK, most of the draft plans were still not publicly available. This raises concerns about the ability of those countries to submit their final plans on time – by the end of 2021 – while respecting the minimum six-month public consultation obligation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents an assessment of 21 draft River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) in eleven EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) and one international River Basin District (Odra), covering 11 topics with 47 indicators.

Public consultations on many of the plans are still ongoing and by using the information included in this assessment, Member States can ensure that this is not just a “paper exercise”, but a strategic effort to secure a resource which is vital to nature and people, and yet highly endangered. The RBMPs should raise their commitments to make significant progress towards the Water Framework Directive’s objectives and halt freshwater biodiversity loss, putting an end to Europe’s unsustainable water management.

However, **20 years after the adoption of the Directive, the assessed draft RBMPs reveal that the commitments to achieving the WFD objectives by 2027 have not notably increased, with a few exceptions.** This is despite the 2019 Fitness Check’s conclusion that implementation, lack of funding and lack of policy integration were the major gaps in reaching the WFD’s goals. For only less than one-fourth of the overall assessed indicator values, the performance of the assessed draft RBMPs is good or high, while it is poor for almost half of them.

The draft RBMPs display a general failure of EU Member States to integrate water protection and the WFD’s environmental objectives for Europe’s waters into agriculture, energy and infrastructure policies. These sectors are among the main drivers of environmental degradation and aquatic biodiversity loss affecting Europe’s rivers, lakes and groundwater resources. Twenty years after the adoption of the WFD, EU Member States continue to direct enormous amounts of public funds in environmentally harmful directions. These adverse subsidies effectively counteract and prohibit the achievement of a good ecological, chemical and quantitative status of our waters.

Two of the assessed RBMPs – both in Finland

– have been awarded ‘high’ or ‘good’ results in several topics. This reflects the efforts that were made during the previous WFD RBMPs.

The Finnish RBMPs are followed by the draft RBMP for French Loire-Bretagne and Spanish Guadalquivir, which have achieved ‘good’ results in several topics and progress towards WFD objectives has been made. On the lower end, the assessed draft RBMPs for the German section of the Elbe, the Dutch section of the Rhine, the international Odra River Basin District (RBD), the two Italian RBDs and the German part of the international plan for the Rhine show multiple areas of moderate and poor performance. The main failings include information gaps, poor planning, and a lack of ambition for achieving WFD objectives.

Some improvements were found in the assessed RBMPs, including measures for dam removal and the adaption of barriers (which is also in line with the targets set by the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy), freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration, drought and flood management and addressing diffuse pollution from agriculture, in particular nitrates.

A major gap in the draft RBMPs is cost recovery and sufficient budget; several plans do not even have a gross budget. Deterioration of water body status is significant in the Polish Odra and the Spanish Ebro. The majority of the draft RBMPs still heavily relies on poorly justified exemptions, despite the fact that they should be exceptional given that the WFD came into force 20 years ago. Most of the draft RBMPs do not provide a summary and explanation of the shortcomings in the implementation of the previous RBMPs.

Almost all assessed draft RBMPs fail to properly address water allocation and abstraction control. Inventories and details on permit reviews for abstractions, and on controls are limited (although Slovakia and Spain are positive examples in this case) which is particularly worrying as climate change is likely to lead to larger water abstractions across the EU.

River basin authorities and EU Member States are currently finalising their RBMPs for 2022-2027 as required by the Water Framework Directive but major delays are observed.

## Our recommendations to the relevant national and river basin authorities are:

- 1. Dedicate a substantial budget to the Programme of Measures.** Protecting and restoring freshwater and the ecosystems it relies on must become an investment priority, and various financial streams, including EU and national funding, must be mobilised. Prioritising investments that are beneficial to water bodies will result in more sustainable and integrated measures that not only meet water needs in different sectors, but also improve sustainability and biodiversity in the aquatic environment. Programmes of Measures should be aligned with other financial plans for supporting biodiversity such as the Prioritised Action Frameworks under the Nature Directives as well as CAP Strategic Plans and National Resilience and Recovery Plans.
- 2. Apply a cost recovery approach to all sectors** and ensure that the financial resources recovered are available for adequate water management services and for eliminating the related environmental and resource costs through all measures. Substantial measures should be taken to apply the cost recovery principle to the sectors responsible for the highest pressures on water bodies: agriculture, energy (hydropower, coal mining and combustion) and shipping.
- 3. Phase out harmful national and European subsidies** including certain agricultural subsidies, state aid to the hydropower sector and energy taxation exemptions for hydropower. Consider increasing the use of mandatory measures and binding criteria to adapt other sectors’ activities so that they contribute to water quality and biodiversity.
- 4. Limit exemptions to exceptional cases,** and ensure that the evaluation of overriding public interest is done in a transparent and science-based manner, and assessed against the public interest of preserving or restoring freshwater ecosystems and their ecological functions. Make sure all planned infrastructure projects are included in the RBMP with an assessment of their possible effect on water body status and accompanied by measures to minimise or compensate for these effects.

- 5. Align the RBMPs with national biodiversity ambitions** by using the RBMPs to plan for measures that restore free-flowing rivers (as required by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030) and by dismantling obsolete weirs, dams and other structures in the river. This should be prioritised over fish ladders which are insufficient. Improve knowledge and measures that ensure that water management contributes to proper water and sediment flows, the conservation of high-quality surface waters and the protection of groundwater-dependent ecosystems and nature protection areas.
- 6. Actively promote the uptake of nature-based solutions, natural water retention measures and nature climate buffers,** as alternatives and complements to traditional engineering solutions. Each RBMP should include a strategy for piloting and upscaling NBS projects so they become the preferential option in planning infrastructural measures.

## Our recommendations to the European Commission:

- 1. Actively encourage Member States** to make sure that the commitments made in the RBMPs are aligned with the ambition of the European Green Deal. It is crucial that the third RBMPs are aligned with the targets set by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy, and that opportunities are fully used in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.
- 2. Make use of enforcement powers** to ensure that more cases of non-compliance with the Water Framework Directive are open and investigated, and delays are shortened.
- 3. Do not tolerate delays** or poor public participation processes in the finalisation of the RBMPs; with special attention to those Member States which have not yet started the 6-month consultation process of the draft RBMPs, such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Slovenia, some parts of Spain, and the UK.

4. **Phase-out harmful EU subsidies** to sectors and activities which counteract and prohibit the achievement of a good ecological, chemical and quantitative status of our waters through: the revision of the EU State Aid Guidelines, the CAP Strategic Plans, the National Recovery and Resiliency Plans, the revision of the Energy Taxation Directive and the EU Structural and Cohesion Fund Programmes.
5. **Mainstream the protection of freshwater ecosystems in sectoral policies** under the European Green Deal to complement and reinforce the Water Framework Directive. The upcoming EU Restoration Law should contain a legally-binding, ambitious free-flowing river restoration target.<sup>3</sup> Particular efforts are also needed to align transport (revision of the TEN-T guidelines, NAIADES III action plan), agriculture (CAP strategic plans) and energy (revision of the Renewable Energy Directive) policies with the objectives of the WFD.

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3. We recommend increasing the current target for free-flowing rivers of at least 25,000 km to 15% of all rivers to be restored to a free-flowing state by 2030 through inter alia barrier removal and floodplain restoration. See Living Rivers Europe, [Protecting and restoring river ecosystems to support biodiversity](#), March 2021.



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