

## **Environment: Commission adopts new directive to fight floods**

*The European Commission today proposed a directive to help Member States prevent and limit floods, and their damaging effects on human health, the environment, infrastructure and property. Since 1998 floods in Europe have caused some 700 deaths, the displacement of about half a million people and at least €25 billion in insured economic losses. The new directive will require Member States to carry out preliminary assessments to identify the river basins and associated coastal areas at risk of flooding. Such zones then will be subject to flood risk maps and flood risk management plans. These plans will focus on prevention, protection and preparedness.*

Commissioner for the Environment Stavros Dimas said: "Catastrophic floods endanger lives and are likely to cause human tragedy as well as heavy economic losses. This new directive will help Member States choose the right tools with which to reduce the likelihood of floods and limit their impacts. In particular, it aims to ensure that Member States cooperate in shared river basins and coastal areas to improve flood protection all over Europe."

Between 1998 and 2004, Europe suffered over 100 major damaging floods, including the catastrophic floods along the Danube and Elbe rivers in the summer 2002. Severe floods in 2005 further reinforced the need for concerted action.

Floods can also have severe environmental consequences, when, for example, installations holding large quantities of toxic chemicals are affected.

### **Flood risks and costs likely to increase**

The coming decades are likely to see a higher flood risk in Europe and greater economic damage. Firstly, the scale and frequency of floods are likely to increase due to climate change - which will bring higher intensity of rainfall and rising sea levels. In addition, failure to manage river systems properly can be compounded by constructions in flood plains with the result of reducing the areas' capacity to absorb flood waters. Finally, an increasing number of people live in areas at risk of flooding, and the number of business and industry located in flood risk zones continues to grow.

### **Why a Floods Directive?**

In response to the 2002 floods, the Commission adopted a Communication<sup>1</sup> on flood risk management in 2004 to improve protection against flooding, in which the need for Community legislation on flood risk management was identified.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2004)472 final of 12.07.2004.

Since most of Europe's river basins are shared by more than one country, concerted action at European level will result in better management of flood risks. A binding legal instrument will ensure flood risks are properly assessed, coordinated protection measures taken and the public properly informed. This basic set of legal obligations will create a firm basis for cooperation, while the Commission will also continue to work with Member States on a voluntary basis to exchange information and best practice.

### **What does the directive require?**

The proposal creates an EU framework for flood risk management that builds on and is closely coordinated with the 2000 Water Framework Directive,<sup>2</sup> the cornerstone of EU water protection policy.

A three-step process is proposed. First, Member states will undertake a **preliminary flood risk assessment** of their river basins and associated coastal zones. Where real risks of flood damage exist, member states shall then develop **flood risk maps**. Finally, **flood risk management plans** must be drawn up for these zones. The management plans are to include measures to reduce the probability of flooding and its potential consequences. They will address all phases of the flood risk management cycle but focus particularly on prevention (such as preventing damage caused by floods by avoiding construction of houses and industries in present and future flood-prone areas or by adapting future developments to the risk of flooding) protection (by taking measures to reduce the likelihood of floods and/or the impact of floods in a specific location such as restoring flood plains and wetlands) and preparedness (for instance through providing instructions to the public on what to do in the event of flooding)).

In the case of international river basins, these steps must be coordinated between the member states concerned to prevent problems being passed from one area to another. Active participation by all interested parties in the development and updating of the flood risk management plans will have to be ensured and the plans, risk assessments and maps made public.

The proposal and accompanying documents, as well as other information on EU water policy, can be found at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/flood\\_risk/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/flood_risk/index.htm)

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<sup>2</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC