

Main water management issues in the Rhine and Meuse districts

RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION



77000 PERSONS REPLIED TO THE RIVER BASIN COMMITTEE CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF WATER

In application of the Water Framework Directive (WFD)

For the first time ever, the public was invited to give their opinion on the future of water in their region, within the framework of a national consultation in application of the WFD (directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000), the purpose of which is to reach good water status by the year 2015 in the 25 countries in the European Union.

In France, the River Basin Committees and Water Agencies in partnership with the State are in charge of this consultation for their respective basins. Two public consultations are provided for by the law transposing the DCE (law 2004-338 of 21 April 2004): one completed in 2005, which focussed on the main water management issues and the work programme and the other for 2007/2008, concerning water management master plans to fulfil the directive objectives.

All locals have been consulted by the River Basin Committee

For the initial consultation, the River Basin Committee, in addition to regulatory measures and the national campaign coordinated by the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, opted for the ambitious aim of consulting each citizen.

The French river basins decided to try out several consultation methods on an experimental basis. Rhin-Meuse was the pilot basin for the water questionnaire sent to all households. This approach was based on a communication plan in the local press, on the radio and TV with a communication targeting the general public, using the likeable mascots of **Claq Claq** the Stork and **Bloup Bloup** the Fish. This system was supplemented with the commitment of strong partnerships concluded with associations, intent on encouraging opinions.

A lot of free opinions with the questionnaires

Water questionnaires were distributed to 1.8 million letter boxes from 19 to 23 September 2005. The water sector managers and participants and in particular the 3200 river basin mayors were given prior notice of the operation and, along the same lines, the press received the communication plan up front. 72,263 questionnaires were returned to the Water Agency i.e. 95.2% of those distributed to letter boxes. 40,211 free opinions were expressed by the public in these questionnaires; 1620 forms were filled in on Internet, 65 handed in to the prefectures, and sub-prefectures; 1053 returned via Rhin Meuse infos. 60 awareness raising actions were carried out locally by associations targeting 4750 persons; 57 contributions were directly addressed to the Chairman of the River Basin Committee including a petition with 491 signatures. The official consultation period was from 2 May to 2 November 2005.

Widespread distribution of results

All questionnaires were processed and analysed. After a call for tender, the Water Agency entrusted this remit to the company Efficiencie 3 in Reims. All the data is available on the website and on request from the Water Agency. The results presented to the River Basin Committee on 27 January 2006 have been transmitted to the Minister for Ecology and Sustainable Development by the Chairman, distributed to water sector participants, published in Rhin Meuse infos and were communicated to the general public via the press in six local dailies in May 2006.

*“Water should be considered
as valuable a commodity as a diamond”*

A respondent

Well done everybody!

Who replied?

The structure of the sample of respondents to the questionnaire distributed to letterboxes is generally representative of the parent population, which is not the case for those who opted to reply through Internet and associations (more specific populations). Internet remains a method very much in the minority (2.25% of total replies) and for the moment cannot constitute a democratic mode of consulting citizens. This remark has been made by numerous people and respondents massively validated the method of questionnaires distributed to letterboxes for the next consultation. However, this unaddressed postal distribution must be accompanied by a communication plan to notify the locals of consultation, as highlighted by the survey commissioned by the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development from the consultancy firm, MOS.

Respondents' Department

Ardennes	5%
Haute-Marne	< 1%
Haut-Rhin	17%
Bas-Rhin	27%
Vosges	11%
Meurthe-et-Moselle	15%
Moselle	21%
Meuse	4%
Other	< 1%

Respondents' age groups

0-19	2%
20-39	31%
40-59	40%
60-74	21%
75 and over	6%

Place of residence

Fewer than 500 inhabitants	15%
500 to 2000 inhabitants	26%
2000 to 5000 inhabitants	20%
5000 to 100000 inhabitants	29%
More than 100000 inhabitants	10%
Meurthe-et-Moselle	15%
Moselle	21%
Meuse	4%
Other	< 1%

Respondents' profession

Farmer	1%
Craftsman	3%
Manager	18%
Clerical	28%
Worker	8%
Retired	30%
Other	12%

Water and scarceness

In the respondents' opinion, water is going to become even scarcer
Water saving is a collective responsibility

Persons who expressed a free opinion spontaneously covered the topic of water scarcity.

In the respondents' opinion, water is becoming scarce, and therefore needs to be protected as it is both a vital resource and the heritage of future generations.

Replies to the closed questions alongside clearly confirm citizens' worldwide awareness including respect for water. Avoid wasting the resource and water saving were highly recurrent themes.

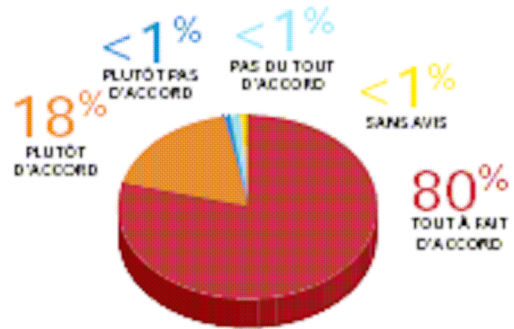
This has to be a concerted effort: households, industrialists and farmers. Proposals were made to develop crops less costly in terms of water and tax household wastage. Local councils and political leaders were also singled out for criticism.

Their responsibility is all the greater as they should lead by example. Younger respondents were less supportive of the idea of water saving.

This is underway!

Since 2001, the Rhin-Meuse Water Agency has granted aid on more than 800 occasions to adapt irrigation management (1100 meters, 150 sprinkling control systems). The Water Agency also assists industrials for the development of processes less costly in terms of water.

1 Moderate (reasonable) water utilisation by households and businesses is necessary (vital).



With 80% of opinion entirely in agreement, there is clear awareness of the problem. Young people of 19 years of age and less are the sub-population the least in agreement.

2 Water consumers (households and businesses) who do not comply with moderate water utilisation must pay a surcharge on their water bill.



77% of respondents are in agreement but especially more or less in agreement with 41% of opinions.

Young people of 19 years of age and under are once again the least in agreement, and OAPs are the most in agreement along with Alsatian inhabitants.

Water and health

The consumer wants to be informed and is willing to change their behaviour.

It is fundamental and clear that water is life-giving! It is understandable why the public thinks that fewer products with an impact on public health should be manufactured or even banned. Manufacturers hold the key to this solution, even if their products become less effective. They must participate in financing pollution control measures (like recycling packaging). However, there were few spontaneous opinions concerning possible interactions between water and health. This is without a doubt a field unknown to respondents and there is a very great need for information and transparency (3). Will people go so far as to be personally involved in their daily life and consumer choices? The responses are less clear-cut but encouraging (4). Should a sales tax be levied on products to pay for pollution reduction measures (5)? The majority are in favour of this idea but a good third of them are opposed to the consumer having to pay. The youngest age groups are those who do not think that this is normal.

This is underway!

For fourteen years, the Water Agency has focused on micro-pollutants (phytosanitary elements, solvents, mercury, lead, etc) within the framework of various water monitoring systems. 170,000 analyses are thus made per year. Amongst the concrete actions taken, the Water Agency encourages justified usage of phytosanitary products by farmers and local councils (agricultural improvement operation, security of storage facilities, alternative methods of weed control, etc).

3 The consumer must be notified of the impact on the environment and water of all products purchased and used, through information on the packaging.

For 98% of the population surveyed, there is a need for information on the environmental impact of products purchased.

This is one of the best rates of agreement gathered during the survey with a high score for the 40 to 74 age groups.

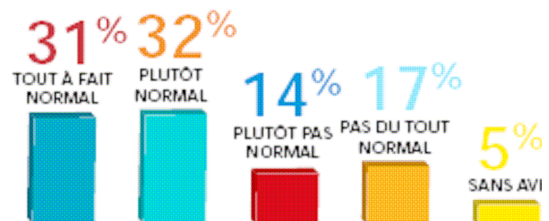
4 The consumer can use products with an impact on environmental and water quality in another way.

However, this would involve changing patterns of daily life. Would you be willing to do so?

Consumers think that they are more or less willing (48%), and even completely willing (46%). On this question of involvement, opinions are less unanimous.

Young people of 19 years of age and less are the least willing to make these changes, whereas the 40-59 age groups are more inclined. Managers constitute the socio-professional category declaring themselves the most predisposed to behavioural modifications.

5 A product may be necessary despite its impact on the environment and water. In this case, product consumers would pay a tax financing water and environmental pollution control measures. Do you think it normal for the product consumer to pay a tax?



Two out of three respondents think that it is normal for product consumers to pay a tax. The remaining third is against this tax being paid by the consumer.

Workers and farmers constitute the categories who think that is the least normal for them to pay for pollution control measures as opposed to managers, craftsmen and OAPs. The younger the population surveyed, the more they are opposed to paying the tax.

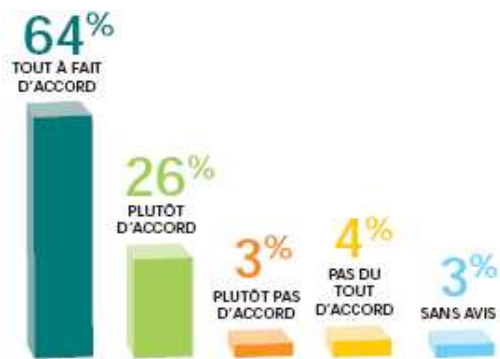
Water and Nature

Sustainable development is the most popular social mode

Our urban societies are losing direct contact with natural elements. For this series of questions of a more technical nature, the questions are answered but there are few spontaneous opinions. For most people, water is what comes out of a tap! And the link between aquatic mediums which are natural reservoirs where humans draw their water supply is not made. However, it is remarkable to observe that natural self-purification of rivers (6) appears to the general public as a good means of pollution control whilst technicians remain more sceptical. Along the same lines, promotion of wetlands (7) to slow down floods and lessen the effects of drought is a topic which is becoming better known with the general public. The idea has even gained majority approval. Some still need convincing of the relevance of the choice!

Not like a fish out of water, it is enough for some fins to appear so that the run of the river immediately takes on a human aspect! The restitution of fish gained almost unanimous approval, this is probably the way rivers will be given back to inhabitants. Free opinions confirm the need for economic development without harming the environment with the added bonus of protection of flora and fauna for Man's pleasure! The way to go is sustainable development and public opinion is increasingly in favour of taking it. However, a certain fear for employment has been expressed.

6 Self-purification of rivers naturally and cost-effectively eliminates pollution. Should this level of natural pollution control be increased?



90% of respondents are in agreement. Expert opinions seem to differ as respondents on Internet and in the Agency newspaper are more numerous to oppose this idea, without a doubt due to scepticism, or fear of being less efficient.

7 A wetland (marsh, peat bogs, flood-prone fields prairies, etc) is beneficial for the water cycle and for man. Stopping the disappearance of wetlands, accepting their presence and perhaps even recreating them is in all our interests.

This proposal gained virtually unanimous approval with 96% of respondents in agreement.

Nearly 3/4 of the population surveyed is even entirely in agreement with this statement.

The youngest and the oldest are the least in agreement and the same goes for farmers.

Water and nature (continued)

This is underway!

Keeping the right reflexes

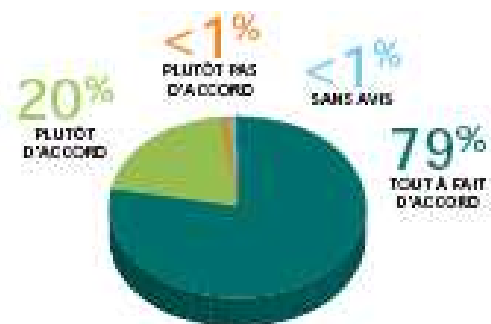
More than half of the main waterways in the Rhin-Meuse Basin, representing 5000 kilometres, have benefited from rejuvenation (replanting of river banks, restoration, etc). These actions, complementary to release sanitation and pollution control have born fruit. The drive is effective and local councils are now committed to a programme of regular maintenance which already affects 1000 kilometres of rivers. In addition, the Rhin-Meuse Water Agency has reinforced its wetland conservation policy. A total of nearly 1000 hectares have now been conserved thanks to acquisition of land and recovery operations.

8 The return of fish to rivers is the sign of a clean bill of health for our environment and our water. Man must be in quest of fresh balances between business and the environment to enable our rivers to be repopulated with fish.

WITH A RATE OF AGREEMENT OF
99% IN FAVOUR,
THE RETURN OF FISH GAINED
VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS APPROVAL.

The farmers are a little less in agreement (66%), and the same goes for the respondents through the newspaper Rhin Meuse infos (70%). The remaining 1% (in disagreement and abstentions) is certainly composed of those who directly fear for their employment within these balances.

9 Good river status (natural beds and banks, conserved free spreading spaces) naturally protects against flooding effects at a lower cost. Incorporation of this natural protection should be used more.



A new technical proposal and fresh majority agreement on principle of 99%.

A little less 'entirely in agreement' from the young age groups and farmers (62%). A little more 'entirely in agreement' from respondents via Internet (83%).

Water and Pollution

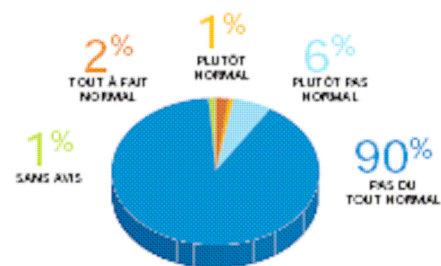
No blank cheques Paying polluters want to see equality of treatment and results for water

This topic gave rise to numerous free opinions from questionnaire respondents. Virtual zero tolerance (10) for pollution. Release is deemed abnormal apart from a few target exceptions. Along the same lines, people are opposed to the idea of granting rights to pollute drinking water reserves (12) in favour of economic development. The feeling that we are not doing what we should is apparent, whereas the three main categories, agriculture, industries and consumers are in the hot seat. Institutions and local councils are accused of not providing the right advice in the matter. People have the feeling that the paying polluter principle is not properly adhered to, especially by economic players.

Industrialists and farmers are put in the same bracket, the former conserving an image of 'large-scale polluters' in the eyes of the general public. Critical certainly but strong on proposals, respondents suggested manufacturing and using fewer polluting products. In their opinion, manufacturers hold the key to the solution. However, a narrow majority are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products (13). It is recognised that the whole of society must make a concerted effort to protect natural resources and water in particular. Those who expressed an opinion have understood that generating pollution is not free of charge and that pollution control measures come at a cost (11), but they do not all declare that they are in favour of participating financially. Paying for the environment remains related to socio-cultural profiles of persons and generations. However, no blank cheques. Guarantees are desirable: equity of contributions, transparency for the destination of the money and its utilisation, and results obtained.

Water and Pollution (continued)

10 River pollution from human activities is due as much to household activities as to economic activities (industrial and agricultural). Do you think that it is normal that polluting release is still poured into rivers without prior treatment?



90% of respondents think that this is not normal at all. However, there is a slight tolerance of almost 10% for pollution amongst them.

For the farmers the share of 'entirely abnormal' is smaller (73%) and that of 'quite abnormal' is higher (19%). The same goes for towns with fewer than 500 inhabitants.

11 River pollution comes from human activities. Pollution control measures are expensive. How much are you willing to pay on a yearly basis on top of what is already included in your water bill to eliminate river pollution? Choose the proposal which suits you best.

TWO THIRDS OF RESPONDENTS ARE WILLING TO PAY AT LEAST 10 EUROS (PER YEAR) ON TOP. NEARLY A THIRD ARE WILLING TO PAY AT LEAST 30 EUROS.

In the first position are 39 years old and under, clerical staff, managers and inhabitants of large towns. On the other hand, the most reticent are among the 40 to 74 age groups, farmers, workers, and OAPs.

This is underway!

No break from purification

The Rhin-Meuse Basin now has 571 water purification stations treating pollution for 3.6 million inhabitants. With virtually half of the aid granted by the Water Agency for reduction of pollution in domestic release, waste water sanitation remains a priority. All of these works embarked upon by local councils have resulted in undeniable improvement in river quality confirmed over the past 10 years.

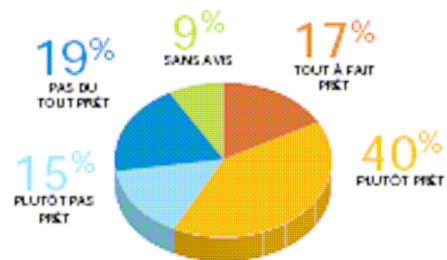
12 Groundwater pollution exposes humans to problems of drinking water supply right away and for the future. Do you accept that certain (natural) drinking water reserves may be partly polluted in favour of economic development?



3/4 of the population expressing an opinion do not agree with sacrificing drinking water in favour of economic development.

The youngest (5%) and the oldest (7%) would be slightly more conciliatory, and the same goes for farmers (5%).

13 For better manufacturing with respect of the environment and water resources, would you be willing to pay a little more for certain cleaning products and foodstuffs?



The results are less clear-cut for this personal proposal.

57% say that they are willing.

The 40-74 age groups are willing to make a financial effort for the purchase of products, whereas they are less inclined to pay more for pollution control measures in their water bill.

Water and Governance

The public wishes to be informed by the Mayors and River Basin Committee. The European Union programme is deemed ambitious

The river basin commune and committee are best placed for providing information. This topic of governance let loose a lot of passion! Numerous free opinions attacked the regulatory action, economic action, informative action and assessment of institutions and participants related to water management, proof of the strength of participative democracy!

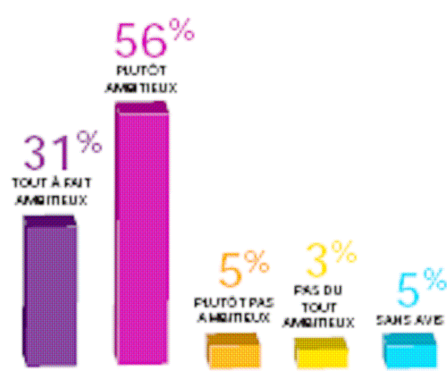
In general terms, respondents did not spare the persons and public or private organisations in charge of water. Our compatriots are very set in their ideas! Ban, limit and control – this is the firm expectation targeting those who behave badly, especially concerning pesticides.

The aim is to obtain more justice and tax the real polluters. Respondents highlight urgency of reaction due to the alarming situation. The aim of the public authorities is laudable (14) but none of them deem it a bit unrealistic or even presumptuous. Certain respondents doubt that the real intent of commitment is due to economic priorities. Water prices are largely unknown. The price and taxes are closely confused and it seems that the composition and destination of the price paid are quite poorly defined.

Some suggested financial reward for ‘good pupils’ (tax credit).

Respondents requested awareness raising helping participants to explain and inform. Even if the regulatory and economic actions are significant, the general public also expects widespread information campaigns using post and extensive means of media (TV, radio and newspapers) to make public opinion aware of their responsibilities. More transparency is also expected concerning amongst other things sanitary (water composition and analyses) and financial (breakdown and utilisation of money) aspects. A note of optimism: certain respondents clearly expressed the fact that the situation is improving. This progress has been observed in various places in the Rhin-Meuse river

14 The objective of the European Union Member States, including France, is to regain good water status everywhere by the year 2015 (rivers, groundwater, lakes, ponds, seas, etc). How would you qualify this programme?



Almost 87% of respondents think that the programme is “quite ambitious” even “extremely ambitious”.

The youngest are those who deem that the project is the most ambitious (0 to 19 years of age: 41% of “extremely ambitious”).

15 The public is consulted and can get information on the progress of work on the Water Framework Directive on the website Internet www.eau2015-rhin-meuse.fr/. The public can notify the Chairman of the River Basin Committee of their observations in writing or by e-mail. Do you think that you are properly involved in this work programme?

More than half reply that they are not properly involved.

The age group of 19 and under thinks that they are the most involved (44% of “completely involved” and “reasonably involved”). The same goes for respondents via Rhin Meuse infos (48%).

basin. Amongst ideas spontaneously given: recovery of rainwater, use of non-drinking water for certain tasks and the quality of water supplied.

Water and Governance (continued)

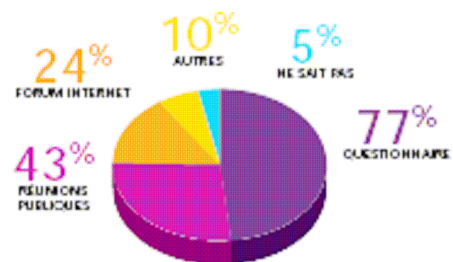
This is underway!

Consistency and discussion

The Basin Committee meets twice a year to draw up the water policy for the Rhin-Meuse river basin district. This committee is equally composed of public authorities, local councils and water users (industrialists, farmers, consumers, socio-professional backgrounds).

The River Basin Committee can thus understand water development and management in a consistent and concerted manner.

16 In your opinion, for future consultations, what means must be chosen by the River Basin Committee to consult you?



More than 3/4 would prefer to be consulted with a questionnaire. Questionnaire was the first choice of all categories of respondents, including those who replied on Internet.

17 In your opinion, who is the best placed to inform you and involve you in the drafting of water policy for the river basin?

THE COMMUNE AND A SPECIAL COMMITTEE ARE OPTED FOR.

The notion of credibility is important, either technical credibility or credibility provided by proximity.

Consumer associations are more frequently mentioned by age groups of 40-59: 6% and 60-74: 7%.

Young people of 19 and under mention less often a special committee (22%) and more often nature conservation associations (14%).

The River Basin Committee thanks all respondents, validates the significant water management issues and is preparing Water Management Master Plans (SDAGE) with strengthened consultation.

The River Basin Committee behind the public consultation in the Rhin-Meuse district was delighted by the size of response from the locals for this initial direct approach and the strong interest expressed in water management and conservation. After extensive discussion, the Committee considered that it could definitively adopt the significant water management issues. They have taken into account urgency of action requested by the public.

The Committee had understood that the public would be demanding when it came to governance issues, especially focussing on the price of water, transparency concerning utilisation of funds, guarantee of results for good ecological and chemical status of water, rivers, groundwater and wetlands. Managers should not lose sight of the fact that despite the generous contribution of respondents to the significant issues of water, the individual involvement of every citizen has not been achieved and remains variable depending on other socio-economic and geopolitical data.

This is why the Committee has decided to strengthen discussion initiatives through various committees and to request that the latter take into account public concerns for future works, like for example fostering water saving.

It is planned to continue educational interventions related to its partners and especially committing itself to acquitting the request for communication and transparency from respondents, young and adult alike.

The Committee, which has operated a special committee for informing and consulting the public for several years, is supported by its results and proposals to prepare information feedback on the consultation to the public, and on the same basis, prepare the next consultation for 2007/2008. The mayors identified as major local relays will also be involved.

**Rendezvous for the SDAGE in
2007!**