

**MiNa-Council
Environment and Nature Council of Flanders**

Advice

of 3 May 2001

about

**the co-operation of the International Com-
missions for the Protection of the Meuse
River and the Schelde River with NGOs, in-
terest groups and sectors**

I. Introduction

In its advice of 21 December 1999 about integral water policy¹ the MiNa-Council unani-
mously argued in favour of a three-part structure for the organisation of the basin policy in
Flanders. The Council made a distinction between an official, a political and a social body.
The MiNa-Council now clarifies that it wishes to extend this structure for the co-operation of
the International Commission for the Protection of the Meuse River (ICBM) and the Interna-
tional Commission for the Protection of the Schelde River (ICBS) with non-governmental or-
ganisations (NGOs), interest groups and sectors to the whole Meuse and Schelde basins.

The MiNa-Council believes that in this way the Water Framework Directive², Article 14 “Pub-
lic Information and Consultation” can be efficiently complied with.

This own-initiative advice is oriented towards the Government of Flanders and the Flemish
delegations in the International Commissions for the Protection of the Meuse River (ICBM)
and the Schelde River (ICBS).

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¹ MINA-COUNCIL, *Advies van 21 december 1999 over richtinggevende principes voor integraal waterbeleid*,
issue. 1999/28, p.44 ff/54 p.

² Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a frame-
work for Community action in the field of water policy, Official Journal No. L 327 of 22 December 2000.

II. Advice

- [1] **Common viewpoint on the principle.** Hereby the MiNa-Council invites the political leaders, the ICBM and the ICBS, the delegations and all consumers of water from the river basins to consider their proposals so that they can be adopted already at the next plenary meeting of 2001 and be ratified at the Ministerial Conference late 2001. Thus the elaborated proposals can be effective by the plenary meeting of 2002.

In order to promote a comprehensive approach to the water policy:

1. The MiNa-Council is pleased with the initiative of the ICBM and the ICBS to co-operate with NGOs, interest groups and sectors;
2. The MiNa-Council believes this initiative is a good impetus, but needs to be further elaborated in order to meet Article 14 of the Water Framework Directive with regard to public information and consultation;
3. The MiNa-Council thinks that no NGO, interest group or sector should aim at a unique bilateral consultation with the ICBM and the ICBS. However, the MiNa-Council wishes to equally involve all consumers of water in the river basin in the spirit of Article 14;
4. To this end, there should be a balance in the participation of all consumers, which also pays regard to the geographical, national and regional spread. Finally, a balance should be aimed at between internationally, nationally or regionally structured organisations.
5. According to the MiNa-Council this balance cannot be efficiently achieved within the existing structures (plenary meeting, work groups) of the ICBM and the ICBS. Hence the MiNa-Council argues in favour of establishing a new structure to this end.
6. The MiNa-Council regards this new structure as an advisory body of the Meuse and Schelde basins in which the various consumers and interest groups are evenly represented. Within this body the various partners should consult about different topics relating to basin policy and basin management with an eye to formulating an advice which includes both their points of agreement and differences of opinion;
7. The advices of this body will be submitted to the International Commission sufficiently on beforehand so as to allow the Commission to take them into account in the decision-making process during the plenary meeting. If the Commission disagrees with the viewpoint of the advisory body, it will substantiate its deviating decision.
8. The MiNa-Council believes that such a work method is more efficient and effective for the NGOs, interest groups and sectors as well as for the ICBM and the ICBS. Moreover, it turns the ICBM and ICBS into pioneers in Europe in the field of public information and consultation.
9. The MiNa-Council offers to present ideas about the composition and operation of such an advisory body.

- [2] The ICBS and ICBM must elaborate a proposal themselves.** The MiNa-Council considers it evident that – now that the proposal has been presented – the International Commissions take the initiative themselves to:
- examine to what extent the other countries and regions will accept the principle of an international basin committee;
 - examine in consultation with the other countries and regions to what extent civil society is prepared to become involved in this type of participation;
 - elaborate a clear proposal for the structure of this basin committee.