

IAWR press release, Amsterdam, 13 February 2020.

Historical Breakthrough: Rhine Ministerial Conference decides to effectively reduce Micropollutants from Households, Industry and Agriculture

IAWR Statement at Rhine Ministerial Conference by President Prof. Dr. Matthias Maier on Water Quality/Micropollutants:

“Statement by IAWR and German environmental organisations BUND and BBU:

Dear Minister van Nieuwenhuizen, dear Director Manfredi, Ladies and Gentlemen,

the IAWR is representing the drinking water suppliers in the Rhine river basin with 61 million people dependent on clean drinking water. The IAWR strongly welcomes the ICPR taking a new route on the reduction of micropollutants. From our point of view, this is expressed by a quantitative reduction objective which is a pioneering commitment in water protection with the ICPR as pacemaker for sustainable development.

Our perspective as drinking water suppliers is focused on delivering clean and natural drinking water. The greatest threat for this is chemical pollution. An enormous number of substances is released by human activities insufficiently controlled into the water cycle.

The IAWR and ICPR monitoring programs for over 5 decades demonstrate clearly, that we have a lot of warning signals to react now. If we miss to take quantified counter actions in the Programme Rhine 2040 an inevitable development will happen with no options to reverse the situation.

The IAWR points out that in the past there were quite a number of substances threatening our drinking water resources which were previously not detected in routine observation programmes. In addition to the presence of them in water bodies, quite high concentrations of these unknown substances have been found - and some of them showed to be potentially toxic.

Recent scientific findings also confirm the massive damage to aquatic organisms caused by micropollutants, which prevent the success of costly renaturation measures.



Furthermore, we must state, that drinking water suppliers are confronted with numerous substances which cannot be eliminated by existing drinking water purification technologies resulting in shut-downs of water-plants. If we do not act, this development will lead to a wide-spread introduction of complex end-of-pipe technologies in the water works. But this is no solution, rather an unacceptable change of paradigm from preventing pollution to allowing pollution at its source and mere damage limitation. It's also the very opposite to Art. 7.3 of the WFD and Programme Rhine 2020 striving for the reduction of water treatment and simple, natural treatment in the waterworks.

We can conclude: In responsibility for the next generation, we are not allowed to let the situation go on. Now, the required steps are

- Strengthening the precautionary principle
- Controlling the source of pollution
- Taking full control over the substances released into the environment by approval of chemicals and discharge permits – including metabolites and transformation products
- Overcoming narrow-minded exclusive support of national interests but including common precautional countermeasures - like a quantitative reduction objective.

The Programme Rhine 2040 will safeguard the drinking water resources for the next generation. Today we paved a way for a future with clean drinking water.”

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