

The members of the regional cooperation bodies are representatives of rural districts, municipalities, maintenance associations, the agricultural and forestry sectors, water supply, industry and environmental associations, under the chairmanship of the NLWKN.

Major functions of the regional cooperation bodies include active participation in the preparation of programmes of measures and management plans, and also sharing information. The findings, statements and recommendations of the regional cooperation bodies are taken into account in decisions by the competent institution.

Involvement of the public is a central aspect of the implementation of the WFD. It gives those taking part an opportunity to ensure that their interests are input into the decision process. The Lower Saxony Environment Ministry supports this through regular information events known as regional forums.

Important management issues

In 2007 the results of the inventory and the first monitoring findings were used to identify issues of importance for water resources management. This revealed that the most important management issues for Lower Saxony in the field of surface waters were:

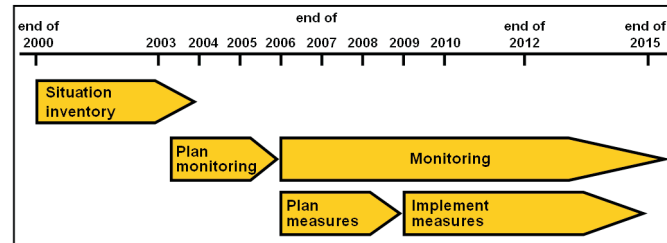
- improvements in watercourse structure
- continuous passage
- reductions in diffuse substance inputs
- reductions in point-source pollution.

In the groundwater sector, diffuse nutrient inputs are of crucial importance for the status of water resources.

Current steps

In line with the timetable for implementation of the WFD, work is currently in progress on planning the measures that are to be implemented from 2010 onwards.

Important essentials for planning these measures include the identified management issues, the work of the regional cooperation bodies, and findings gained from pilot projects, such as the EU-LIFE project WAgriCo, the AGRUM project at the level of the Weser catchment area, the Interreg IIIB project NoNegret and 17 Lower Saxon projects.



Chronology of main working steps under the WFD

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Lower Saxony Water Management, Coastal Defence and Nature Conservation Agency



The EC Water Framework Directive

Implementation in Lower Saxony



Lower Saxony

The Water Framework Directive

From many rule books to a framework directive

Until the year 2000, European water policy was characterised by more than 30 EU directives relating directly or indirectly to water conservation. These widely differing pieces of legislation no longer provided a satisfactory basis for an up-to-date European water policy. As a consequence the European Water Framework Directive, or WFD, was drawn up. It was published on 22 December 2000.

The Directive has 26 articles and 22 annexes which form the basis for uniform and coordinated action in the field of water management and policy.

Water management revisited: What is new?

The WFD regards our rivers as a large ecosystem that needs to be protected. The directive therefore sets out to ensure that as soon as possible, and preferably by 2015, the status of all water resources in Europe should be classified as good; as a minimum, there should be no further deterioration in their status. This is a real challenge for Lower Saxony too, and especially for the NLWKN (Lower Saxony Water Management, Coastal Defence and Nature Conservation Agency), which is at the forefront of the efforts to implement the WFD. Central management is the responsibility of the Ministry for Environment and Climate Protection.

The directive from Brussels has quite clearly set new standards in the field of water conservation. It calls for a holistic ecological approach and a sustainable management to water which ultimately benefits the entire population: after all, the aim is healthy rivers and clean groundwater!

One idea that is new to German water resources management is the consideration of entire river basin districts extending beyond political and administrative boundaries (river basin management). What this means for us in practice is that the boundaries of the rural districts or municipalities no longer apply:

After all, water knows no borders either. That is why we think in river basin districts.

The central instrument here is the legally binding management plans for these river basin districts.

Milestones on the way to clean water

The WFD had to be transposed into national law by 2003. In Germany this was effected by means of amendments to the Federal Water Act and water legislation in the *Laender*. Lower Saxony decided to incorporate the legal framework conditions in the Lower Saxony Water Act in unchanged form.

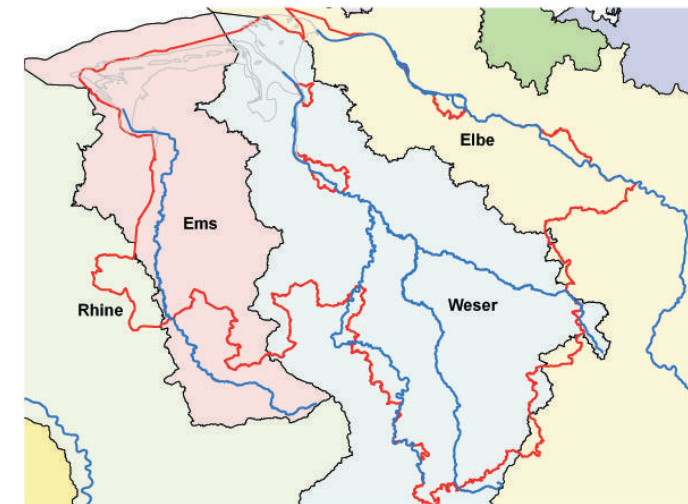
In 2005 the NLWKN, in strict accordance with the EU timetable, presented a comprehensive inventory of groundwater pollution and its impacts on water status. The inventory confirmed that great progress has been made on the water quality front in the past 25 years; pollution levels had been reduced considerably. It also showed, however, that there was an ongoing need for further efforts to improve the status of our water resources to a level that fully maintains their natural functionality as a habitat and at the same time provides sustainable safeguards for the many different ways in which they are used by humans.

Since 2007, systematic monitoring of water resources according to the new rules has been in place, especially in locations where there is doubt about the objectives being achieved. By the end of 2009 we have to draw up at least one tailor-made programme of measures and viable management plans for each river basin district. And in the process we must involve interested parties and the general public. This is because not only the monitoring findings, but also the results of public participation in 2008 and 2009 will also find their way into the management plans that are to be submitted to the EU in 2010.

From 2010 onwards the measures listed in the management plans must be implemented in order to achieve the targeted status of water resources by 2015.

WFD in Lower Saxony

Lower Saxony belongs to four river basin districts: Elbe (yellow), Ems (red), Rhine (green) and Weser (blue). Parts of these river basin districts lie within Lower Saxony, as the following map shows. Transboundary consultation on the implementation of the WFD takes place in the working bodies of the river basin associations.



Lower Saxony parts of national and international river basin districts

Lower Saxony has defined 32 management areas based largely on hydrological boundaries, with the aim of ensuring clear and manageable areas for management and measures planning.

Regional cooperation bodies have been set up in these management areas. The aim is to achieve successful implementation of the WFD in river-specific and regional units in cooperation with local interested parties.