



## Results overview for the Po river basin (Italy)

This fact sheet summarises the results of the Water and Wetland Index for the Po river basin (Italy). Information about the project and the different issues presented in this fact sheet can be found in the WWF Report “Water and Wetland Index - Critical issues in water policy across Europe” (2003).

### Water Resources in the Po river basin

The Po river extends over an area of about 71,000 km<sup>2</sup> and includes six regions: Lombardia, Piemonte, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Veneto, Valle d'Aosta and the autonomous province of Trento. It covers about 24% of the national territory, with a resident population of about 15,700,000 inhabitants. The impact of human settlement is therefore very high but the most important impact is agriculture: 4,200,000 heads of cattle and 5,200,000 pigs represent the animal production activity. Farming activity is carried out on 31,000 km<sup>2</sup> of cultivated land, 50% of which is irrigated.



## Application of Integrated River Basin Management principles

### Public participation in water management

#### Information provision

The key documents and plans are published on public bulletins at the national and regional level but not proactively disseminated.

Existence of arrangements<sup>1</sup> ☹

Adequacy<sup>2</sup> ☹

#### Public consultation

There are no standard mechanisms to enable public consultation. Consultation occurs only under heavy pressure of public opinion for specific plans or projects.

Existence of arrangements ☹

Adequacy ☹

#### Active involvement

The Po basin authority has promoted the creation of a Consultation Committee including a number of stakeholders. However, this committee has not been officially established and has no real influence on decisions taken by the authorities.

Existence of arrangements ☹

Adequacy ☹☹

<sup>1</sup> This assesses the existence of arrangements (e.g. the celebration of information days, the existence of public consultation procedures, the existence of water management plans, etc).

<sup>2</sup> This assesses the adequacy of the existing arrangements and their implementation on the ground. It is based on the opinion of WWF, partner NGOs and other water stakeholders.

## Integrated management of water resources

### Integration of competencies in water management

There is a single institution that is responsible for planning on a basin scale (the Basin Authority) and tries to have an integrated approach. As a result of this effort, the hydrological management plan for the Po river (2001) is the basis for regulating all the human activities in the river basin. However, other institutions (Regions, Provinces, City Councils, Drainage Authorities) are in charge of implementing the planning and their actions are too fragmented and often only following local interests.

Existence of arrangements  

Adequacy  

### Integration of water policy with sector policies

See text above.

Existence of arrangements 

Adequacy  

## Wetland management

### Integration of wetlands into water management

Although the positive functions of wetlands is recognised in many documents there are no measures to integrate them into water management

Existence of arrangements 

Adequacy  

### Wetland protection policy

The hydrological management plan for the Po river (2001) contains measures for the protection and restoration of wetlands. Wetlands are protected if they have a “special” conservation value otherwise they are not considered in a coordinated policy.

Existence of arrangements 

Adequacy 

### Wetland restoration policy

Restoration actions are rare and uncoordinated. In 2001, WWF Italy and young entrepreneurs from Confidustria promoted the so-called “Patto sui Fiumi” (River Pact) to push a change towards economically and ecologically sustainable solutions for river restoration.

Existence of arrangements  

Adequacy  

## Response to key pressures and impacts on freshwater ecosystems

### Water quantity problems (agriculture)

#### Approach to the problem

In the Po Basin, every year about 27.9 billion metres of water are withdrawn. Annual consumption for agricultural use is estimated at 20 billion cubic metres (more than 70% of the total water used). There are no plans to reduce the water consumption in agriculture and the problem is not even recognised.

Adequacy



#### Legal & regulatory instruments

Water use is regulated by permits but the consumption is not properly metred and the water cost is based on filled surface rather than the effective quantity.

Adequacy



#### Financial & economic instruments

There are no financial or economic instruments to promote among farmers the improvement of their irrigation techniques in terms of water use efficiency.

Adequacy



#### Information & voluntary instruments

There are no structured information campaigns or voluntary instruments which aim to reduce the water consumption of agriculture.

Adequacy



## Water quality problems (agriculture)

### Approach to the problem

All the water resources of the basin are exposed to a high level of anthropic pressure generating an organic load equivalent to that produced by 114 million inhabitants, approximately 33% of which is due to waste produced by agricultural and animal production.

Adequacy 

### Legal & regulatory instruments

There is a permit system for water discharge coming from point sources (animal manure or slurry), but water quality controls are rare.

Adequacy 

### Financial & economic instruments

The authorities have not introduced financial and economic measures in order to reduce water pollution coming from agricultural sources.

Adequacy 

### Information & voluntary instruments

Written, web-based or face-to-face advice on best practices have been promoted but these activities are very patchy and don't follow a general plan or strategy to reduce water consumption.

Adequacy 

## River fragmentation due to infrastructure

Nearly 25% of the land along the banks of the Po have been denuded of natural vegetation to make way for sterile plantations of poplars harvested for cellulose; the river is dammed for hydroelectric power; more than half its total length is immured by man-made earthen embankments called "argini" that protect towns and fields, all of which have only made the Po's floods fiercer and more disastrous when they occur.

River fragmentation and flood defence 

#### Legend:

Good  Fair  Poor  Very poor 

#### Further information

The WWI for Italy was completed by WWF Italy

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