



Brussels, 27/10/2014

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC CO-ORDINATION GROUP

4 NOVEMBER 2014

Agenda point 5n: Preparation of the call for expression of interest to take part in the peer-review mechanism for the improvement of WFD implementation for both River Basin Districts Authorities and experts

STATUS BOX

This is an updated information on the setting up of peer review mechanism, following the communication made at last 1 October SCG meeting. The establishment of a peer review exercise was discussed at the SCG meeting on 30 September and 4 November 2013 and presented at the Water Director Meeting in Vilnius on 4 December 2013. The consortium formed by International Office for Water (France-lead partner), together with the National Institute of Hydrology and Water Management (Romania) and the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organisation Secretariat (Spain), has been awarded for the setting up the peer-review mechanism, and to insure its secretariat for the next 2 years. The contact detail of the new secretariat is: peer.review@oieau.fr. SCG remains the main channel to homogeneously inform Member States at the different foreseen steps of the peer-review mechanism development. The main focus of this communication is to **get the SCG members view on the draft Manuel of Procedure** that will be used as basis for launching the future call for expression of interest to take part in the peer-review mechanism for the improvement of WFD implementation for both River Basin Districts Authorities and experts.

The SCG is invited to:

- **Review the draft manual of procedure** submitted by the secretariat. Written feedback expected **by 14 November**.
- Be prepared to:
 - Facilitate the next step of dissemination of the calls to practitioners of RBM Planning. The call will concern on the one side organisations involved in RBM Planning proposing WFD implementation item to be reviewed based on a visit/mission of experts from other basins or a hands-on workshop and on the other side Europass Curriculum Vitae of voluntary experts to contribute to the peer review.

STEPS OF THE SETTING UP OF A PEER-REVIEW MECHANISM

Step 1: on 15 September 2014, the Commission has signed a 2 years contract with a consortium in charge of setting up and coordinating the peer-review mechanism. The Peer Review Secretariat will be responsible for launching and collecting expressions of interest from RBDs and from experts to participate in the review, organisational issues, facilitating the contacts between peers, covering expenses, etc. The SCG was informed on this development on 1 October.

Step 2: the Peer Review Secretariat, in consultation with the Commission and the Member States (through the SCG), establishes the protocol to perform the peer-reviews, compile in a "manual of procedures". The draft version is presented at this November SCG meeting, with 2 weeks deadline for SCG comments. The manual will be tested based on case study during a work session back to back to the newt Euro-INBO meeting in Bucharest 12-15 November. Participants are welcomed to contact the secretariat to take part to this session.

Step 3: launching the call for expression of interest in December 2014 for, on the one side, organisation involved in RBM Planning proposing WFD implementation item to be reviewed based on a visit/mission or a hands-on workshop, and, on the other side, voluntary practitioners willing to contribute to the peer review based on their Europass Curriculum Vitae and competence field identification. The response of river basin district authorities and experts will be expected by end of January 2015. Relevant proposal of peer review mission or workshop will be invited to detail their proposal by developing terms of references for the proposed action in line with the framework document proposed.

Step 4: an initial report on the results of the call and tentative timetable for first peer reviews is presented at the SCG meeting in February 2015

Step 5: First peer-reviews will be performed in spring 2015. The calendar of each specific review will be set in the Terms of Reference developed by the RBDs which participate in the exercise.

Step 6: Continuation of Peer-reviews until Spring 2016 and organisation of Hands-on workshop on specific topics

Step 7: Summer 2016, elaboration of lessons learnt documents

REMINDER OF THE PEER-REVIEW OBJECTIVES

The objective is to set up a simple, voluntary and targeted system to allow mutual learning between peers about WFD implementation and participative river basin management planning. The main actors will be the practitioners from river basin districts authorities responsible for the implementation of the WFD, which will voluntarily submit RBMPs related issues to the review performed by experts from other member states. The final output of this mechanism is the improvement of the WFD implementation across River Basin Districts (RBD) by sharing experience involving various European Member States (MS).

At the time of adoption, the WFD introduced many new concepts in governance, economic analysis and technical challenges for a sustainable and integrated water resources management. The CIS process has been successful in delivering a range of guidance documents which have supported the implementation in the Member States and have contributed to harmonised implementation. However, the Commission assessment of the RBMPs has shown important differences in implementation. Some Member States are doing significantly better than others in certain areas of implementation. Best practice can be identified in almost all areas of implementation. The successful experience of these best performers has a potential to help improving the implementation in other Member States.

The Commission, in the 2012 Blueprint proposes *"in the framework of the CIS, to set up a simple and voluntary **peer-review system** through which river basin district authorities could submit their draft RBMPs to the review by other district authorities, within the same or in other Member States. This is expected, to favour mutual learning and improve the quality of the plans and their compliance with WFD requirements. The Commission could help identify, on the basis of its assessment of the first cycle RBMPs, the river basin district authorities that could benefit most from such an exchange"*.

The impact assessment accompanying the Blueprint states that *"Peer review (...) has proved to be an effective process in other areas of EU law. Sharing of experience between colleagues allows for a problem-solving approach to be taken. The option is entirely voluntary based on the needs of those authorities which wish to have a peer review. Costs from other peer review process are small, impacting on both the recipient authority and those from other Member States conducting the review. However, results from other peer reviews are positive and this option is likely to be effective. The public consultation showed support for this option."*

MAIN PRINCIPLES FOR THE PEER-REVIEW

It is a **voluntary exercise**: both the bodies proposing to the subject related to RBMP planning to be reviewed and the experts participating do that on a voluntary basis.

It is a **peer-to-peer** mechanism of review, meaning there is no intervention from the Commission or any other actor on the scope or the conclusions of the peer-review. The responsibility of the conclusions lies on the experts that have made them and the responsibility on their implementation on the authorities which were subject to the review.

The **scale of the review** is, in principle, the RBD, although in some countries where the implementation across the RBDs is very homogeneous, the scale of the review can be expanded to the whole country.

The **scope of the review** will be defined by the RBD/MS which voluntarily participates in the review, by means of a Terms of Reference document. This could cover broadly the whole WFD implementation process, but the review is likely to be more effective if it is targeted to specific issues. The subject matter of the review can be of technical nature (e.g. setting effective monitoring programmes), deal with governance aspects (e.g. mechanisms to interact with stakeholders) or cover issues related to specific sectors (e.g. implementation of agriculture measures).

The **experts** performing the review will generally be employees of bodies directly involved in RBMPlanning. They will not be paid for their work but only for travel, subsistence and accommodation expenses.

The preferred **language** of the peer-review process will be English. If necessary, arrangements to use other languages will be limited to few main documents and interpretation at main meetings.

The average **estimated work load** for a peer-review of an RBD is around 10 working days per expert, including a visit to the reviewed RBD. Depending on the scope of the review, the process will involve between 2 and 5 experts.

The **outcome** of the peer-review will be a short report by the experts in which they include specific recommendations as a conclusion of the process.

It will be up to the RBD or Member State subject to review to decide whether it makes **available to the public** the Terms of Reference of the review and/or its conclusions and recommendations (partly or in full).

The **timing** of a particular peer review will be established by the RBD or Member State which is reviewed, subject to budgetary and organisational capacities of the Secretariat.

Other **complementary mechanisms** such as targeted hands-on practical workshops spreading best practices on specific issues of WFD implementation may also be organised by the secretariat, at the request of several RBDs or Member States, using the network of experts and RBDs/Member States established through the peer review process. This mechanism could address particularly complex issues in which a few Member States are fairly more advanced than the majority, and would allow a more efficient use of the expert time put at the disposal of the peer review process, as it would target several RBDs/Member States at once. The workshops organised through this process should add value by providing hands-on, practical experience, involving a smaller number of participants, lasting longer and being more technical than the usual CIS workshops.

Contacts:

Peer review Secretariat:

peer.review@oieau.fr

European Commission:

Lourdes Alvarellos ENV C.1 (+32 229 97733 Lourdes.ALVARELLOS@ec.europa.eu);

Jorge Rodriguez Romero ENV C.1 (+32 229 57193, Jorge.Rodriguez-Romero@ec.europa.eu)