



**Proposal for Europe-INBO 2016 workshop on
“Circular economy and water re-use; what solutions and what role in the River Basin
Management Plans ? “**

Concept note

V2

June 2016

Context and Objectives

At European level, the publication of an EU action plan for the circular economy¹ in December 2015 has brought into light the concept of circular economy. Among others, it contains a series of actions on water reuse, including a future legislative proposal on minimum requirements applicable to wastewater reuse (scheduled for 2017). Already in 2012, the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe’s Water had highlighted the importance of investigating what water re-use may offer in the context of WFD implementation. In addition, the creation of a working group of the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) and the drafting of a document on guidelines for wastewater reuse practices sparked collections of experiences in connection with the elaboration of River Basin Management Plan. Those European works have also raised lively debates among Member States, European Commission and stakeholders on the place and relevance of reuse and its preconditions as regard their integration in the RBMPs, taking into account that priority must remain on finding solutions for water saving before mobilising water re-use practices.

In this context, it is proposed to organise a workshop on **“Circular economy and water re-use: what solutions they may bring and what role they can play in the River Basin Management Plans and reaching the WFD objectives?”** in the frame of the next conference of the Europe-INBO, on October 19, in Lourdes, France.

¹ European Commission Communication “Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy” (COM(2015)0614).

One objective of this workshop is to compare practices and practical experiences of Member States and basin organisations on recovery and re-use of wastewater in the context of RBMPs and WFD objectives, and promote the exchange of questions and solutions in those domains.

More generally the workshop also addresses the need for elements of strategies followed by Member States or basin Organisations to include the principles of circular economy at basin level, especially by focusing on local or sub-basin actions that have been implemented and that could be duplicated elsewhere.

Contents

The workshop will offer a room for reflection and exchange of experiences on different themes with a view to expressing strengths and weaknesses based on these experiences. In a first approach, and after an introduction part that will set-up the scene on the EU and MS in dealing with circular economy and water re-use projects, the main themes and questions that are proposed to be investigated during the workshop would be, from a RBD authorities and managers point of view, as presented below.

Theme 1: A new, 'circular' perspective on water management and River Basin Management Planning

Despite the increasing occurrence of “circular economy” topic in media and general policy objectives, the integration of underlying concepts into the river basin management planning process has not fully taken place yet. More than just looking at the treated wastewater re-use aspects, applying those concepts for water management shall also encompass the “re-use” of energy, of water, of nutrients and other substances (more generally resources recycled or produced from wastewater), promotion of resource positive utilities... It also requires scrutinizing what could be the benefits or drawbacks of applying the ‘circular’ concept at the basin (or sub-basin) level, as the unit of management and development of specific strategies, policies, incentives and financing tools, technical tools..., and the levers or barriers to adopt the circular economy principles in the water management context.

This work session aims to exchange and compare practices and practical experiences of Member States and basin organisations in this regard, particularly on the aspects of governance, funding, followed approach...

Theme 2: Recovery and re-use of wastewater

Over abstraction of surface and groundwater bodies is an important pressure and in some areas of Europe this may be driven by wider problems of scarce water resources and increased by climate change. In order to address this pressure and meet WFD objectives, Member States should adopt measures. The 2007 Communication on Water Scarcity and Droughts stresses that appropriate measures should take account of a ‘water hierarchy’, which emphasises the need to address water saving and efficiency as a priority. However, where this is not sufficient, additional water sources might be needed. Recovery and reuse of treated waste water is one such possible source.

Moreover, in recent years the implementation of re-use projects has also been foreseen for qualitative reasons, following the principle of adjusting the quality of the treated water source (as a replacement source for example) to actual quality requirements for some uses.

Taking stocks of the recent development and implementation of re-use projects and their potential benefits or risks if not undertaken properly, in terms of water balances but also of still pending debates concerning potential health risk or psychological reluctance from citizens, the discussions will focus on the way to better integrate re-use projects in the overall river basin management planning.

The following questions will guide the exchanges.

- What are the pre-conditions for integrating re-use measures in the RBMPs (Art. 5 analysis, over-abstraction and significant pressures, qualitative aspects, water scarcity context...)
- What policies and tools (financing, technical, governance...) at basin level could be set to include ensure the development of re-use projects integrated with the RBMPs and Programme of measures?
- How to engage citizens, stakeholders in the process?

Participants

The contents of the workshop will not be too scientific nor technically focused as the INBO's audience is made of a variety of profiles, such as river basin policy makers and managers. For example, the various technologies for water re-use won't be discussed at technical level.

Thus the suitable profiles for this workshop are those of "generalist field managers", belonging to WFD competent authorities or basin organisations and members of the Europe-INBO network, involved in water management planning or decision making process. No high level technical profile is required given that the exchanges are not sought to be at a too technical level. Participants of this workshop would be the usual participants of the Europe-INBO's conferences as this workshop would be fully part of the conference agenda.

For any further information or expression of interests, please send an email to:

workshop_reuse@riob.org