

Restoring Europe's Rivers

Review of European policy drivers for river restoration

RESTORE is an EU LIFE+ funded project aimed at supporting existing and future river and floodplain restoration activities across Europe. The **RESTORE** project aims to develop the tools and skills to enable the restoration of rivers for future generations creating sustainable river environments. The project will develop a network linking policy makers, river basin planners and a wide range of practitioners and experts across Europe. It will run for three years until September 2013. The project has a number of preparatory actions including a review of policy drivers.

River restoration involves working with nature to re-establish natural river systems

This is a review of policy drivers for river restoration. The purpose is to share knowledge and experience that will be of value to all partners and stakeholders and to inform future policy debate.

This high level review defines the key drivers and EU legislation and policies that promote complex and integrated forms of floodplain and catchment river restoration. It identifies the most significant barriers and constraints that need to be overcome in EU Member States. Examples of good practice are also referenced to facilitate an exchange of information between stakeholders within and across different Member States.

Principles

Traditional **drivers** of river restoration arise from European and National **legislation** and **policy** relating to environmental protection and nature conservation; water protection; fisheries management; flooding and flood risk management; landscape and projects by private developers and individuals.

The majority of river restoration projects undertaken to date have generally involved non-complex land ownership issues and are restricted in the main to single sites. Generally these are projects primarily driven by a single piece of legislation or policy.

Recent policy shifts require a **larger-scale** more **holistic** and **integrated** approach to restoration.

Drivers include floods in Europe over the past decade leading to a view to the use of floodplains for natural storage; the need to improve water quality and morphological status; and enhanced

The challenge

Work by the EU has shown that despite efforts over the past decade or so (in response to environmental directives) there has been a continued deterioration of and threat to valuable habitats. This is not necessarily due to how this legislation is implemented in EU Member States; rather it is a reflection of the difficulties of overcoming one or more of the **obstacles** to implementation. Although there are ongoing calls for policy change, the findings of this review indicate that there are institutional structures and **learning lessons** which can be transferred from one Member State to another.

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Legislation and Policy

A range European Directives or national legislation/ policies and implementation programmes have led to an actual demand for river restoration tools and techniques and these can generally be grouped into two categories:

1. Those which **drive** the delivery of river and catchment restoration, because restoration offers a means of meeting the objective of the Directive or policy
2. Those which **support** the delivery of river restoration, through wider environmental improvements, such as water quality, without which a restoration project might fail.

Legislative Drivers:

- Habitats and Birds Directives
- Water Framework Directive
- Floods Directive
- UN Biodiversity Plan
- EU 2020 Biodiversity Plan
- Rural Development Programmes
- Climate Change Adaptation Policy
- Land Use Planning Policies

Supporting Legislation:

- Common Agricultural Policy
- Nitrates Directive
- Groundwater Directive

Barriers and Constraints

- Inflexibility of existing legislation and policy
- The need for a closer alignment of multiple policies
- The requirement to purchase of land outright or change in use of land
- Limits on funding in the current economic climate
- Complex institutional and administrative boundaries
- Issues with land use planning and land use planners
- Multiple and competing floodplain uses
- Agriculture land use requirements and practices
- Water quality, especially high silt loads
- The promotion of hydropower schemes which require weirs or dams
- Lack of public and political understanding or acceptance of river restoration
- Complex restoration projects require multiple consenting regimes
- Lack of a scientific evidence and monitoring to demonstrate the value of restoration
- The need for stakeholder involvement to address social issues

Overcoming barriers – Good Practice

Projects which have overcome barriers and constraints provide **lessons** which demonstrate the types of **opportunities** for river restoration which may have wider applicability across Europe, these include:

- **Combining** legislative and policy drivers
- The use of **land banks** and **land exchange** mechanisms (e.g. Netherlands and Denmark)
- Raising funds through improved **benefits and costs evidence** (e.g. Ecosystems Services)
- Improved **predication** of adverse impacts of development (e.g. The Dutch Water Test)
- More **integrated spatial planning** (e.g. Room for the River Programme, Netherlands)
- **Catchment Coordinators** to address diffuse pollution issues (e.g. Scotland)
- **Stakeholder partnering** (e.g. Rivers Trusts in the UK)
- Large scale **connectivity** and fish pass programmes (Austria; Finland)
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It is clear that in some Member States there is a lack of political will to implement effective national policies to facilitate river restoration. Many barriers can be overcome through effective participation of stakeholders and by adopting effective approaches to implementation. In general project management and coordination skills of individuals are central to the successful delivery of restoration. Many specialists in Member States believe that we should 'learn as we go'. There are some residual constraints, including the need to build capacity of individuals and organisations as the demand for projects increases at a rapid rate.

Anyone with comments or additions to make (including significant case studies in Member States) is invited to contact the Project Manager: antonia.scarr@environment-agency.gov.uk