

Science for Environment Policy

Public participation in flood risk management: the case of Germany

How can stakeholders best be involved in the implementation of the EU Floods Directive? According to recent research examining Germany as a case study, three types of strategy are being pursued across the country's 16 federal states: the first draws on Water Framework Directive (WFD) procedures, the second meets only minimum requirements for participation and the third involves stakeholders more intensively.

Like many other EU policies, the [Floods Directive](#) requires EU Member States to involve the public in planning procedures. Policymakers' participation with wider society is expected to lead to better informed decisions that are more widely accepted.

The Directive states that the public (including non-state interested parties, such as farming groups and environmental NGOs) must be encouraged to be actively involved in drafting Flood Risk Management Plans. These are due to be submitted by Member States to the European Commission by December 2015. How Member States choose to involve the public, however, is not prescribed by the Directive.

This study explored some emerging approaches to public participation in Germany. Each of the country's federal states decides how to involve the public in planning and very different forms of participation have arisen, despite similar overall conditions.

The researchers analysed a variety of documents to find out about public participation in the Directive in Germany. These included planning documents, consultants' reports, and official websites of German environmental ministries and agencies (for example, [Hessisches Landesamt für Umwelt und Geologie](#)), pilot projects and management plans (for example, for the river catchments Fulda and Elbe).

Six states are planning to use structures and procedures that have already been established for the [WFD](#), a closely related policy. Generally, these consist of an advisory board at state level, and participatory forums at lower levels within river basin districts.

Bavaria, for example, has passed planning on to Regional Water Forums, which are an important participatory mechanism under the WFD. They include representatives of civil protection, cultural heritage and the insurance sector.

Five states meet only the bare minimum requirements for stakeholder participation, which is conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, and to a lesser degree than for the WFD. For instance, public participation in Saxony amounted to consultation events during drafting of the plans.

The third strategy used is much more inclusive and bottom-up. As an example, Baden Württemberg has developed flood partnerships which are designed to encourage cooperation between municipalities within sub-basins. There is also a state-level advisory board which includes representatives of both the federal state and non-state organisations such as cultural heritage groups, industry and environmental groups.

The researchers found that no German states appear to involve the lay public in their planning, despite flooding's direct impacts on public safety, homes and livelihoods. In addition, although the Floods Directive suggests aligning planning with the WFD, most states in Germany are not doing so.

It remains to be seen which strategy is most effective. However, the study suggests that more inclusive approaches than are currently practiced would promote better-informed decision-making. In the past, public engagement has delayed flood protection measures, so the researchers also recommend structuring participation into plans with clearly stated deadlines to help avoid this in future.



11 September 2014
Issue 385

[Subscribe](#) to free
weekly News Alert

Source: Newig, J., Challies, E., Jager, N. & Kochskämper, E. (2014) What Role for Public Participation in Implementing the EU Floods Directive? A Comparison with the Water Framework Directive, Early Evidence from Germany and a Research Agenda. *Environmental Policy and Governance*. Early online. DOI: 10.1002/eet.1650.

Contact:
newig@uni.leuphana.de

Read more about:
[Environmental information services](#),
[Natural hazards](#),
[Sustainable development and policy assessment](#)

The contents and views included in *Science for Environment Policy* are based on independent, peer-reviewed research and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.

To cite this article/service: "[Science for Environment Policy](#)": European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.