



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Allow space for rivers, respect natural functions of floods and create cross-border partnerships: flood network recommends**

*EU-funded FLAPP network publishes results of two-and-a-half-year project on sustainable flood management solutions*

**Maastricht, Netherlands – Following a two-and-a-half-year Europe-wide project involving 35 organisations in 12 countries, the FLAPP network (Flood Awareness & Prevention Policy in border areas) has published its recommendations on flood prevention and management to the EU and to national, regional and local governments.**

**For example, FLAPP recommends in its report that land development in natural flood plains should allow space for rivers and be compatible with floods, rather than relying solely on structural protection measures as has often been done in the past. Flood risk management plans should be based on nature conservation and management, and should respect the ecological functions of floods, river systems and wetlands. And most important, neighbouring countries and regions should strengthen their cross-border partnerships in developing flood prevention and management plans and measures, based on a holistic river basin management approach.**

Relating to the latter point, in particular, FLAPP urges authorities in border regions to take an integrated river basin approach to flood prevention and management planning, and not one based on regional or national borders. Floods impact the whole of a river basin and do not respect borders, whether national, regional, local or administrative. The best way to achieve an integrated river basin approach is therefore by intensifying cross-border cooperation, based on a common understanding of the problem and the needs and interests of parties on both sides of the border.

#### **Cross-border partnerships create confidence and trust**

This kind of cooperation should have the aim of developing common goals, strategies and funding approaches – where necessary even involving cross-border investments. This in turn can only be achieved if cross-border partners get into the habit of sharing knowledge and working and planning together, thereby creating the required basis of confidence and trust.

The same applies to emergency and evacuation planning, which should be developed jointly by the countries or regions concerned, and based on a clearly defined allocation of responsibilities and agreed procedures for providing mutual assistance when necessary. Other important aspects referred to in the FLAPP recommendations are increasing public awareness to inform both the public and decision-makers on both sides of borders about their shared water resources and the associated risks; cost recovery for flood management measures from the beneficiaries where possible; and encouraging the involvement of the private sector, for example insurance companies which can influence their customers to take a more active approach to measures for flood prevention and mitigation.

### **Increasing flood risks and declining public awareness**

Sustainable flood management has become an urgent issue in Europe, FLAPP points out. In the past decade there have been a number of major floods in Europe, causing fatalities, displacement of people, high economic losses and a large impact on nature. The severity of floods depends on a combination of natural and man-made phenomena, while human intervention also appears to reduce the resilience of river basins to flooding – for example by reducing the natural buffer function of flood plains and wetlands. Of course climate change is a potential further challenge, which is likely to further increase flood risks. And while the ongoing occupation of flood plains is increasing the risk of damage, at the same time the investments in traditional flood safety and prevention measures are reducing public awareness of and concern about flood risks.

### **Cross-border cooperation not yet everyday practice**

Against this background, FLAPP advocates a joint, cross-border approach wherever possible, based on better knowledge and information-sharing, and a more broadly based planning process to allow measures to be taken where they will have maximum effect. But while the benefits of cross-border cooperation are clear, it is by no means everyday practice in Europe. In practice numerous obstacles are encountered, including differences in language, culture and personal behaviour, terminology and concepts, legal systems and institutional structures, and even not knowing whom to contact on the other side of the border.

Just two simple examples serve to illustrate these obstacles. In the Three Countries Park project (Germany/Belgium/Netherlands), it was found that the Dutch direct style of writing did not match the more formal Belgian (Walloon) and German styles; while in the Lower Nemunas Delta (Lithuania/Russia), Lithuanian flood management specialists do not know who their counterparts on the Russian side are because the Russian safety plan is a secret document.

### **Library of good practices facilitate knowledge-sharing**

FLAPP hopes to address these and many more practical challenges in its report and associated products. An important resource is a library of good practices containing many practical examples of flood management policies and measures at local and regional levels. These aim to promote and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience between partners in the FLAPP network.

Summaries of 11 good practices are published in the FLAPP report; the full texts together with descriptions of around 60 further good practice cases provided by partners – ranging from cross-border flood mapping and renaturalisation projects to cross-border monitoring systems and public awareness tools – can be found on the FLAPP website at [www.flapp.org](http://www.flapp.org)

FLAPP has also issued a number of research reports and public awareness tools, taken a range of regional cross-border initiatives, organised study visits and expert meetings, and five conferences during the FLAPP network project. The final FLAPP conference was held in Zaragoza, Spain, on 13 and 14 June 2007.

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#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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#### **NOTE FOR EDITORS**

##### *What is FLAPP?*

FLAPP stands for "Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas". It is an EU-funded network through which local and regional flood experts from across Europe share knowledge and experience about how to prevent and forecast floods, evacuate people and limit the damage when floods happen.

##### *Partner organisations*

The FLAPP network consists of 35 organisations in 12 different countries in Europe. Partners are spread over several catchment areas, amongst which are the rivers Danube, Tisza, Ebro, Meuse, Rhine, Scheldt, Elbe and Oder. Three partners are located in non-EU countries (Romania and Serbia-Montenegro). FLAPP participants range from local and regional water managers on the operational level to university researchers. Lead partner of the FLAPP network is the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (Maastricht, The Netherlands). See map for partner locations and catchment areas.

##### *Results*

The network operates from January 2005 until August 2007. It develops long-term practical ideas for managing rivers and streams in ways that protect the environment as well as defending Europe's communities and economy. The FLAPP network produced a flood management guide with some concrete examples of projects in European border areas. Based on practical knowledge and experiences the FLAPP network will also try to formulate an integrated approach to flood management in border areas and produce policy recommendations.

##### *INTERREG IIIC programme*

The FLAPP operation has received a subsidy from the programme funds within the framework of the Community initiative programme INTERREG IIIC West Zone. INTERREG IIIC is an EU-funded programme that helps Europe's regions form partnerships to work together on common projects. These projects enable regions to share knowledge and experience that will help them develop new solutions to economic, environmental and social challenges. 98% of all European Union regions are involved in INTERREG IIIC projects. There are more than 250 INTERREG IIIC projects running involving 2500 local and regional actors from 50 countries; 20% of these are from new EU Members. More info: [www.interreg3c.net](http://www.interreg3c.net)

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