



© Naval Safety - Onema



© Pierre Steinbach - Onema



© Michel Bramard - Onema

# Better protection of aquatic environments thanks to the water police

How can aquatic environments be protected from damage by human activities? Onema works with State services and public agencies by providing technical advice and by running a number of inspections in the field. The objective is to ensure compliance with regulations and report any offences. This activity is part of an inspection strategy set up in each French department by the MISEN (Inter-agency water and nature group) under the authority of the Prefect.

- Accidental pollution, diversion of rivers, obstacles to ecological continuity, destruction of spawning grounds, modifications in river regimes and in their physical characteristics, filling in of wetlands, poaching, etc. are all examples of damage to aquatic environments caused by human activities for industry, agriculture, urbanisation, energy production and recreational purposes. When they cannot be avoided, the impact of modifications on rivers must be reduced to protect aquatic environments, however, this will require a change in attitudes and behaviour that Onema can accompany. In addition to the indispensable efforts to inform, raise awareness and support projects, inspection activities are an important element



© Guillaume Czerny - Onema

of public water policy in view of achieving good ecological status of water bodies, as stipulated by the European water framework directive. By participating in inspections on water use, Onema plays a decisive role in attaining that objective.

## Opinions and advice to avoid or limit degradation

- Onema personnel contribute to preventing damage to aquatic environments during construction or engineering work, or when activities on rivers increase by making people aware of the impact of their modifications. Many projects or activities are regulated, i.e. a declaration or authorisation request must be filed with the Prefect and the project owner must provide, prior to the work, detailed information on the status of the aquatic environment and on the potential impact of the project on the environment. The State services that process the request contact Onema to determine the measures required to prevent, reduce or compensate the impact of the project on the environment. Onema personnel provide a technical opinion based on their knowledge of aquatic environments. Onema also assists the water police (DDT(M)) in identifying and mapping rivers, spawning grounds and wetlands, all crucial zones for ecological quality.

THE TECHNICAL WORKFORCE OF **600**, BASED IN LOCAL ONEMA OFFICES, CARRIES OUT INSPECTIONS IN THE FIELD (250 FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT JOBS).

**7 246** TECHNICAL OPINIONS PROVIDED FOR WATER-POLICE PROCEDURES (PREVENTIVE ACTION).

**25 500** INSPECTIONS IN 2014 WITH A **66%** COMPLIANCE RATE.

**3 322** POLICE REPORTS (OFFENCE REPORTS, FINES).

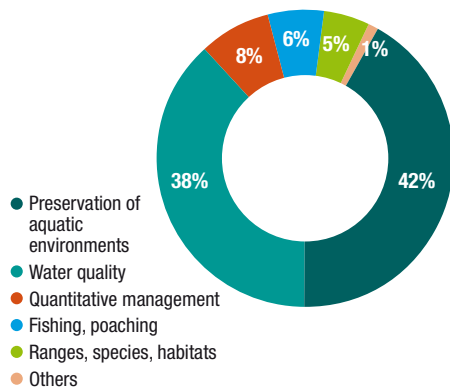
2014 data

## Better protection of aquatic environments thanks to the water police

### Joint strategy for inspections by State services and Onema

Almost 600 Onema technicians, based in the local offices, run inspections to ensure compliance with regulations concerning use of water and aquatic environments, and to report any offences. Inspections are carried out in the framework of the Departmental inspection programme established by the MISENs (Inter-agency water and nature group)<sup>1</sup>. In compliance with the programme, a majority of the inspections target areas or activities where significant issues are at stake (*see the box*). The programme also lists the inspections that contribute most effectively to the objective of protecting aquatic environments, habitats and species. Onema is a major participant in drawing up the programme for inspections on surface waters, rivers and wetlands.

#### Inspection activities in 2014 Water issues and the preservation of aquatic environments



<sup>1</sup> The MISENs group State services involved in water and nature policy, notably the departmental territorial (and maritime) directorates (DDT and DDTM), the departmental directorates for the protection of the population (DDPP), the Maritime agency, Voies navigables de France (VNF - French waterways) and the Regional health agencies (ARS).

### Inspection operations with other partners

For complex projects and when major inspection operations are planned (e.g. hydroelectric plants, fish farms, efforts against organised poaching), Onema joins forces with other entities including the water police, the veterinary services, the Gendarmerie (rural police force), the National agency for hunting and wildlife and the Maritime agency. Joint teams are set up.

### Work monitored by the State prosecutors

Onema and the State services include the State prosecutors in monitoring the inspection work with a triple objective in mind, namely 1) raise the awareness of prosecutors concerning water and aquatic-environment issues, 2) organise regular monitoring of the cases transmitted to the courts and 3) propose effective, proportionate and depending on the type and seriousness of the offence.

### Support during crisis management

In the event of a crisis concerning water and aquatic environments, the experts from Onema can be called in. For example, during a water shortage, Onema can be contacted by a MISEN to set up an observation system to calculate the water deficit or, if flooding occurs, the agency can assist in analysing the damage to aquatic environments and advise local stakeholders on restoration and impact-reduction efforts.



© Michel Bramard - Onema

### THE MAJOR ISSUES INVOLVED IN INSPECTIONS ON USE

- Preserve the hydromorphological characteristics and the hydraulic regime of rivers and spawning grounds.
- Protect the quality of water and aquatic environments (temperature rise, suspended matter, pollution, unsuitable species).
- Efforts against organised poaching of protected species (eels and glass eels, salmon, etc.).
- Migration of fish upstream and downstream in protected rivers.
- Minimum flow rates downstream of dams and other installations.
- Ensuring that pesticide-free zones along rivers are not contaminated.
- Preserve wetlands as a source of biodiversity and water resources.



© Michel Moresay - Onema

Contact:  
[pascal.lagrange@onema.fr](mailto:pascal.lagrange@onema.fr)

Read more:  
[www.onema.fr](http://www.onema.fr)

Contact