



## A national centre to promote river restoration

*A one-day event organised by Onema in collaboration with the French Ecology Ministry (MEEM), the Water Agencies and the French association of Public Territorial Basin Institution (AFEPTB).*

In a few months, France will have its very own National Centre for river restoration, like a number of other European countries. In order to collectively consider this centre's priority activities, Onema organised a day of discussion with the relevant public-sector stakeholders on 1 December 2015 in Paris, in collaboration with the French Ecology Ministry, the Water Agencies and the French Association of Public Territorial Basin Institution (AFEPTB).

Engineering projects carried out over time to facilitate economic development, such as meander cutoffs, river-bed modification, the construction of dikes, weirs and dams, or concretising riverbanks, are disrupting aquatic environments and altering their quality. Hydromorphological pressures affect 50% to 70% of the total number of bodies of water in river basins in France and beyond. Restoring rivers is a priority, in particular for meeting the expectations of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). With widespread pollution, hydromorphological pressures are "one of the leading factors for not achieving good environmental status for water-courses, as demonstrated by European studies and work carried out in French basins in order to finalise the river basin management plan (RBMP) over the past few months", explained Laurent Roy, Managing Director of Rhone-Mediterranean and Corsica Water Agency. This major issue for our rivers is only just emerging as it is still seen as complex, onerous, and perhaps even conflictual. However, there is no shortage of best practices. After a period of knowledge acquisition and launching major pilot operations over the past decade, many ecological restoration projects have been carried

out in France and Europe since 2010, managed by public contracting authorities such as river syndicates and other local stakeholders. However, the challenges of water quality, flood prevention and the fight against climate change require these projects to be completed more quickly, bringing ambitions in line with more functional ecological restoration.

In order to meet this objective, France wishes to create a National Centre for River Restoration (CNRR) and join the European Centre for River Restoration, like a number of other European nations. This national centre will help networking between restoration practitioners and will improve the visibility of on-the-ground actions.

"Networking could expand existing networks and regional dynamics by drawing on work already carried out by Onema, requiring additional efforts on the complementarity and added value of this network," explained Laurent Roy. The CNRR is also designed to be a resource centre accessible to all relevant stakeholders and anyone who would like to get involved. The event of 1 December focused on discussing the activities of the future French national centre and how the network of restoration professionals will operate (see diagram on page 2). It was also the opportunity to better understand the role of the European centre and existing national centres in Europe, thereby confirming that the issue of river restoration is not unique to France.



Restoration of Eddleston watercourse in the Tweed Basin, UK candidate basin for the European Riverprize in 2015

© River restoration Center UK

## The European centre: an inventory of tools and strategies

In order to best support the development of river restoration projects, primarily managed at local and regional level, knowledge needs to be pooled and the various restoration experiences and approaches discussed. Sharing at both local and national or international level is key to promoting best practices on this complex and recent topic. This is the goal of the ECRR network, created in 1995, with 13 national centres, 800 individual members and around ten partners, including Onema. *“This network provides an inventory of tools and strategies, based on experiences and information sharing which is difficult to find at local level. Each member can inform another of where to find the most useful information,”* explained Martin Janes, Managing Director of the River Restoration Centre in the United Kingdom. The ECRR operates using a website, publications, newsletters, international conferences and thematic working groups.

## Diverse national structures with common goals

National centres currently exist in various legal forms. Above all, a centre must represent a broad range of river restoration practitioners (technicians, researchers, experts, etc.). The number of employees of a national centre also varies depending on its type of structure and the available funds. The United Kingdom centre is an independent NGO with nine full-time staff, whereas in Finland, it is a small research institute supported by a group of around ten people spread across various organisations (regional authorities, forest management board, river associations, etc.). Nevertheless, these centres share the same goals and activities, with the priority of facilitating restoration actions by sharing knowledge, promoting the best techniques, supporting networking or advising various on-the-ground contracting authorities.

Websites, case studies publications and guides are available, and professional seminars, thematic workshops

and training courses are also organised. For example, thanks to the European Restore Life+ programme, the United Kingdom centre published the RiverWiki website in 2013, featuring 933 river restoration case studies in 31 countries.

*“Like Wikipedia, anyone can access it and add information that will then be approved by a moderator,”* explained Martin Janes. Technical site visits are also organised by national centres in their respective countries and abroad. *“This gives us the opportunity to see interesting projects, like the Gave de Pau for salmon migration, or in Germany where they created habitats as a mitigation measure, receiving excellent results,”* explained Jukka Jormola from the Finnish centre, Syke.

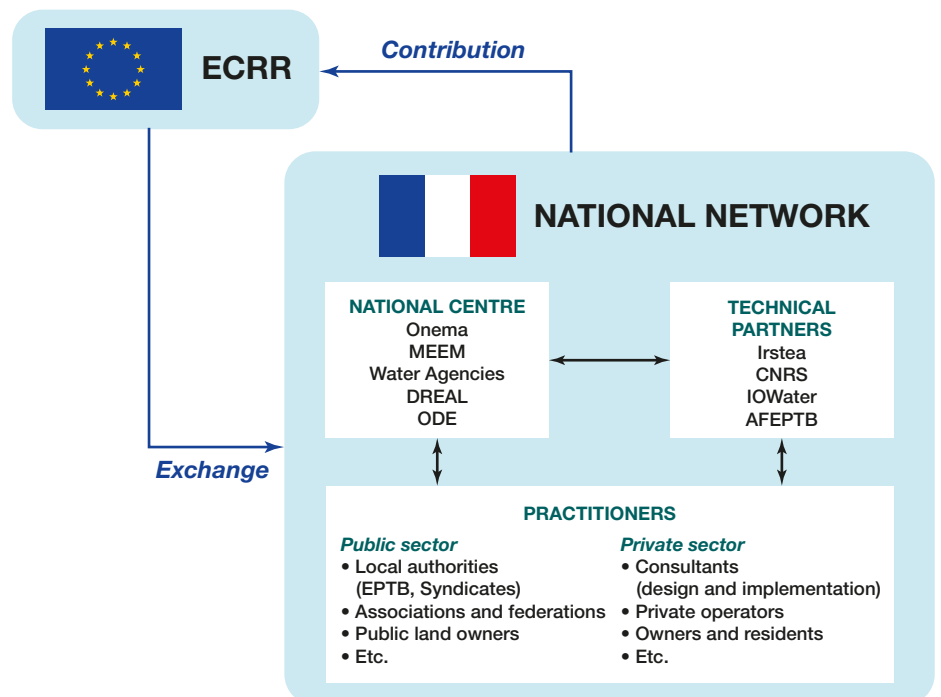
But before sharing this information and planning these events, some centres created in the 1990s, like in Italy or Finland, needed to define *“river restoration”* as this idea was almost non-existent and often misunderstood at the time. Since then, the technical foundations have been laid and many projects have been carried out.

*“There is now real experience in Europe and also in France with regard to restoration actions,”* explained Benoît Terrier, Project Manager at the Rhone-Mediterranean and Corsica Water Agency. In France, many local, regional and national

organisations are working on this topic, and the number of river restoration projects has increased since 2010. One of the objectives of the RBMP 2010-2015 is to preserve and restore the function of aquatic environments. The creation of the CNRR is key for speeding up the development of these actions. For France, it should be formed of several operating entities: Onema, Water Agencies, regional directorates of the environment, agriculture and housing (DREAL), French Ecology Ministry (MEEM) and the Water Offices (ODE) in French overseas territories. The national river restoration network will therefore comprise the national centre, technical and scientific partners (Irstea, CNRS, IOWater, etc.) and practitioners from the public sector (local authorities, associations, federations, etc.) or private sector (consultants, owners, residents, etc.) (see diagram below).

## Shared expectations and actions already in place

During the event, stakeholders from the future national network expressed their expectations, particularly in terms of the resources to be published (case studies, guides, tools, etc.) on a well-structured website dedicated to restoration. Searching for references should be



## Mathilde André, Chair of the *Demain Deux Berges* association

This association seeks to bring together, coordinate, train and inform a network of technicians via a discussion forum for members or by organising technical discussion events on themes communicated by our members. We have also developed a partnership with four other regional groups, called Réseaux Rivières, with the shared goal of promoting the comprehensive and sustainable management of aquatic environments and water. Réseaux Rivières meets the technical and pragmatic needs of on-the-ground practitioners for all topics in their field of work, not just the restoration of aquatic environments.

made easier thanks to a search engine, which also includes French-language information from other countries. The CNRR needs to find the best way of sharing information available in English, in order to make it accessible to as many people as possible. In addition to the website, there will need to be technical seminars, discussion events and online training. With regard to legal considerations, such as land management, restoration stakeholders would also like the CNRR to present case laws and provide support based on advice for project implementation.

Furthermore, having access to examples on the implementation of actions that specifies the scientific, human and social aspects or includes ecological or socio-economic benefit assessments was often mentioned as a key requirement during the discussions. *“However, restoration project monitoring and assessment are relatively young dis-*

*ciplines,”* explained Pierre Mangeot, project officer at Rhine-Meuse Water Agency, adding that *“the socio-economics of restoration is emerging, with first results also recent.”* Lots therefore remain to be done on these topics, in terms of knowledge acquisition, but also and especially, for sharing information with restoration stakeholders.

In order to meet some of these needs, the centre could draw on existing and sound foundations. For its resource centre role, the CNRR will be able to rely on the knowledge-sharing and coordination work already launched by some operators on the topic, particularly Onema and the Water Agencies. These organisations have websites with many pages dedicated to river restoration (see Find out more). Guides, handbooks and studies on best practices have also been published and river restoration examples, more than 90, have been compiled with practical information sheets.

## Paul Michelet, CEO of Onema

There is no doubt surrounding the topic of reducing pollution in water policy, unlike river restoration where there are constant questions on the need and purpose of these operations. Within the CNRR, there is therefore a great need for developing the ability to convince the stakeholders involved in projects and the beneficiaries. Evidence needs to be provided from an environmental, social and economic perspective. Restoration operations need to be part of local projects and it is therefore important to promote these three dimensions. Knowledge must also be shared, by capitalising on and passing down experience.



On-the-ground consultation between partners



Visit to the Quine river morphology restoration project with the United Kingdom River Restoration Centre, Onema, Sources de la Sèvre Syndicate and Sèvre Nantaise EPTB

## The need to involve existing stakeholder networks

In order to increase the knowledge available and expand the national network, the CNRR will need to draw on existing stakeholder networks, particularly at a regional and local level. Associations such as *Demain Deux Berges*, with around one hundred aquatic environment management professionals in the Adour Garonne basin, play a key role in information feedback. The French Association of EPTBs (AFEPTB) brings together 29 authorities, including 27 EPTBs responsible for managing various river restoration actions (studies and planning, coordination, project management), and is another example of an association that could contribute to CNRR *“The AFEPTB is an intermediary association that could contribute to the CNRR via its members’ and partners’ projects. It could also analyse needs on this topic in order to define the tools that must be developed to meet these requirements,”* explained Catherine Gremillet, Director of AFEPTB.

Significant coordination work will also be required from the national centre in order to take into account local needs (in collaboration with regional networks) and pass down information.

In order to best communicate with these stakeholder networks and identify skills and complementary features it has been suggested that a directory be created. This document will need to be presented by organisation and skills (technical, social, legal skills, etc.), and also by type (contracting authorities, financial institutions, on-the-ground stakeholders) while displaying links to the relevant river restoration projects, where possible.

## Awareness-raising and reconciling: great expectations

The CNRR will also need to develop a strong "Communication" strategy, providing appropriate arguments for each target audience. In particular, the economic, social and ecosystem interests of restoration actions need to be consolidated and promoted in order to raise the awareness of citizens and elected officials.

Films, reduced models and arguments will need to be adapted to the target audience in order to promote the benefits of these actions. *"It is clear that there is a fundamental need to convince people in this field. There are no regulatory obligations to restore rivers,"* emphasised Pierre Mangeot. Benoît Terrier believes that *"we need to define how we talk to elected officials and decision-makers in order to convince them to get involved in this type of project, and also to the general public so that the issues are better taken on board at local level."* One of the final roles expected of the CNRR is to help reconcile public policies. *"The national centre should help ensure the coherence of the different national development policies, whether for the restoration of aquatic environments, flood prevention, energy generation, natural resource management or agro-environmental funds, etc."* explained Mathilde André, Chair of the *Demain Deux Berges* association.

**Alby Schmitt**, Assistant Director of the Water and Biodiversity Department, MEEM

Restoration of watercourses is an environmental and also regulatory priority, particularly with regard to the WFD. We need to move more quickly in this field and change our way of looking at and understanding problems. Stakeholders need to dare to step off the beaten track so that we can "move more quickly." They will need to find new ways of thinking, identify the best techniques available and increase their on-the-ground applications. These projects must not only be incorporated within environmental policies, but also within development infrastructure and energy and risk prevention policies. The conditions are now favourable. The French Gemapi law introduces the statutory requirement for local authorities to manage aquatic environments and flood prevention, and will help them to identify and structure project managers. Relatively significant funding has been planned as an incentive in Water Agency programmes in this field. Remember that Onema, and soon the AFB, is driving this process forward with all public and private partners.

In addition to unanimous recognition of the usefulness of a French centre for river restoration and the actions already undertaken in this field, this event identified priority objectives to meet in 2016. The first is to raise the profile of the national centre in order to communicate its missions and existing tools and to coordinate with restoration stakeholders.

The second involves consolidating the national network with the involvement of existing stakeholder representatives, implementing a charter of principles for sharing and exchange with these network leaders. ■

### Find out more

The event presentations are available on the following website:

<http://www.onema.fr/retour-sur-la-journee-d-echanges-sur-la-creation-du-centre-national-pour-la-restauration-des-0>

Web pages dedicated to the hydromorphological restoration of watercourses:

- <http://www.river-restoration.onema.fr/>
- <http://www.onema.fr/rubrique/preserver-et-restaurer-l-hydromorphologie-et-la-continuite-des-cours-d-eau>

ECRR website: <http://www.ecrr.org>

### Event organisers

Josée Peress, Jean-Michel Cardon, Department of inspection and Territorial Action

**Andrea Goltara**, Director of the Italian river restoration centre, CIRF

The CIRF was founded in 1999 and its early years primarily focused on defining river restoration. A multi-disciplinary working group met for around one year to jointly draw up the guidelines of this approach. Compared to other countries, political support for restoration, if indeed we may call it support, remained limited in Italy over the following years, leading us to increase lobbying at national and regional levels. Even today, the CIRF is more often called upon to stop degradation (whether hydroelectric power or flood protection) rather than to work on real restoration cases. Nevertheless, the development (central role), sharing and dissemination (networking role) of best practices for defining, implementing and monitoring restoration actions remain the CIRF's primary objectives. Interaction on similar topics with other countries is extremely important for meeting these goals.

## Onema MEETINGS



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