

Members of the European Parliament granted an audience with the King of the Danube River

A conference organised by the European Parliament Recreational Fisheries Forum on the 19th April 2014 shed light upon the worrying state of the Danube basin by examining the case of one of its endemic and iconic species, the Danube salmon.



A panel of experts coming from all across Europe illustrated a very critical description of the state of the Danube and its tributaries all along the river basin, which encompass Germany, Austria, Slovenia, the Balkans and Romania. Throughout the basin, human activities such as agriculture, construction navigation and most significantly hydroelectricity generation, have all seriously impacted the rivers.

The event, chaired by the Romanian MEP and President of the Forum Norica Nicolai, focused on the case of the Danube salmon describing it as both a barometer for these rivers' health, and a symbol for all scientists and nature lovers. By definition the Danube salmon is a European fish, as its natural territory spreads over twelve countries - from the Slovenian Alps to the Romanian Danube delta.

*“The Danube salmon serves both as an indicator and a symbol for intact river systems [...]. Experience shows that large or dense hydropower development is incompatible with the conservation of Danube salmon” –
Dr. Steven Weiss, University of Graz, Austria*

The question of the impact of hydropower dams on the Danube salmon's habitat was raised several times whilst discussing its problems. The anglers of the EU are working on several restoration projects along the Danube. They are also asking for the protection of the remaining intact natural habitats, such as the Slovenian rivers, where the fish spawn very successfully, as demonstrated by Dr. Dasa Zabrc from Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia.



Mrs. Irene Lucius, the director for Danube Basin Conservation at the WWF, presented some of the programs and activities underway for the protection of the Danube in Austria. Through multi-stakeholder dialogue and the development of coordinated management plans in the framework of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), good results can be achieved. The very successful example of the revitalisation of the tributaries of the Danube River in Lower Austria is a clear example of this.

The question of habitat connectivity was also touched upon - the Danube salmon being a great migratory species which is able to swim up to 100 km in order to return to its birthplace. The very subsistence of this species depends upon its ability to migrate. It is for this reason that this conference took place in the framework of the 2016 World Fish Migration Day.

“We don’t need new rules but more political will”

MEPs and participants concluded that a better implementation of both the existing Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive rules was needed. “The birds are much more protected than the fish, they even have their own EU Directive. However, fish are just as important. They are an indicator of the water quality”, said Mr. Fred Bloot, President of the EAA. Preserving key habitats and mitigating the impact of hydropower plants will be decisive for the survival of the King of the Danube.

For more information on the Forum and pictures of the event, click [here](#).



From left to right: H. Wannigen (WFMD), I. Lucius (WWF), S. Weiss (Graz University), MEP N. Nicolai, MEP I. Jakovcic, D. Zabric (Fisheries Research Institute Slovenia) and MEP R. Serrao Santos.