

ACTION PROGRAMME RAAB/RÁBA

Austria and Hungary are – not least due to their long history they share – both interested in maintaining a high degree of good neighbourly relations. Accordingly, both countries attach great importance to resolving current challenges bilaterally in a constructive and amicable way. This joint intention is also expressed in the understanding between the two Ministers of Environment with regard to a resolution of open questions concerning foam formation and water quality in the Raab/Rába River in the Austrian-Hungarian border region.

On 16 May 2007, the Ministers of Environment of both countries agreed to set up a bilateral task force to resolve unresolved issues with regard to foam formation and water quality in the Raab River. The Task Force took up its mandate in May, concrete solutions are expected for September.

Now, slightly more than one month after the Task Force was set up and two months prior to the set deadline, both Ministers are in a position to present a joint Action Programme for the Raab River based on the intensive work conducted by the joint Task Force. The Action Programme comprises the following approaches to resolving the issues at hand:

1. Stricter environmental requirements in connection with tanneries

The Austrian Minister of Environment will stipulate a new value for chloride levels in bodies of water. This is key to limiting the salt load in bodies of water. To date, no regulation had been in place for this aspect. The limit value will be fixed within the framework of an ordinance.

The Austrian Minister of Environment will introduce stricter provisions in the **Emission Ordinance for Tanneries**. In so doing, proposals made by the Vienna University of Technology will be applied, which are based on the expertise of the university gained by virtue of the Raab Study.

To this end

- a new parameter will be introduced, and a limit value will be set for this parameter, to characterise the foam capacity of waste water (surface tension) and
- tighter limit values for the organic load in waste water, i.e.
 - COD value (Chemical Oxygen Demand) and
 - TOC value (Total Organic Carbon), will be introduced.

The drafts of these ordinances will be reviewed in early July. A period of four weeks is envisaged for this legal review. After the results of the expert opinions have been integrated into the ordinances, they will be proclaimed in September. Any adjustment deadlines will be kept appropriately tight.

Moreover, discussions are already being held with the companies concerned regarding the quickest possible establishment of a third treatment stage on a voluntary basis.

2. Tighter controls

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Environment has taken steps to ensure that the local administrative offices in the factories

- intensify their controls,
- are stricter in their monitoring of compliance with the consensuses
- and instigate criminal proceedings, if necessary .

These measures are effective immediately.

The monitoring of water bodies will be continued in accordance with the bilateral agreements and an automatic quality measurement point will continue to ensure additional surveillance. The results will be presented continuously to the Hungarian authorities and to the public under the restrictions of related Austrian law.

3. A third treatment stage for waste water from the leather industry is in preparation

To resolve the foam issue, additional treatment stages will be implemented with the leather factories Feldbach, Jennersdorf and Wollsdorf.

For this purpose, the following preparatory work is underway:

After many months of preparation, the proprietor of the leather factory in Feldbach has built a flotation testing facility to ensure additional purification of his waste water, paying special attention to the foam issue.

The factory is undertaking its own tests. At the request of the Austrian Environment Ministry,

- the testing facility is also being subjected to a technical evaluation by the Vienna University of Technology (with special regard to the impact on surface tension) and
- analytical checks are being carried out by the Federal Environment Agency, Vienna.

Initial results are expected in the beginning of August. If results will not be satisfactory, another additional treatment process will be tested.

As a result, the following steps will be taken for the designated locations based on the new limit value ordinances:

- Expectations are that expert opinions on the essential projects for Feldbach and Wollsdorf, which are currently under review with the Hungarian side, will be fed back promptly.
- Then all three factories will be requested by the authorities to present supplementary projects in order to put into practice a third clarification stage.
- In accordance with the water agreement, these will be presented to the Hungarian side for quick consultation.

- Then approval will be given for licenses under water and commercial law.
- Once the permits have been issued, the factories will be able to apply for the subsidisation of state-of-the-art plant components.

At this stage, actual implementation can begin. Quickest possible implementation is assured.

4. Reduction of salt load in the Raab-Lafnitz system

Opting out of geothermal power generation in Fürstenfeld is planned for the end of 2009, at the latest. From this time onward, the organic load originating from this power plant will be eliminated. The concentrated salt load in the Raab-Lafnitz system will be reduced by approximately 50% by taking this step.

5. Joint projects for the ecological rehabilitation of the Raab River

Both ministers commission the Austro-Hungarian Border Waters Committee and the national authorities to begin planning immediately. Then, initial implementation measures can begin as early as 2008. The measures primarily intend to

- put an emphasis on renaturing through ecological flood control,
- ensure fish permeability (fish ladders in the case of transverse structures, etc.)
and
- bringing back the river to its original natural form,

all in the frame of a joint river basin management plan of the Raab-Lafnitz system which may be considered as an outstanding international demonstration project.

This calls for the cooperation of both countries. Ensuring active participation of the people in keeping with the principle of public participation of the EU Water Framework Directive will be given top priority in this process.

6. Transforming the Task Force into an Austrian-Hungarian action group to ensure the monitoring of the implementation of the ACTION PROGRAMME RAAB/RÁBA.

Both ministers commission the Task Force to ensure the monitoring and supervision of the implementation of the Action Programme Raab/Rába and to report directly to the respective ministers.