

Experts slam Poland's Odra-Vistula Flood Management Project financed by the World Bank

The measures which the Polish government is planning to implement as part of the World Bank-financed Odra-Vistula Flood Management Project will not enhance flood protection and may even increase the risk of flooding.

The Save the Rivers Coalition is sounding alarm: *“The Polish government is implementing a project financed from a World Bank loan, which will not improve flood protection in Poland and may cause massive environmental destruction. It is a waste of public money which could be spent so much more usefully in other sectors”* - says **Ewa Leś**, the Coalition's co-ordinator.

“Expert studies by Polish and German specialists demonstrate that the measures planned for the lower Oder are not optimal and may be ineffective. The money we're borrowing will fund investments that will increase the risk of flooding” – warns **Radosław Gawlik**, president of the environmental organisation EKO-UNIA and Coalition activist.

Two reports by Polish and German experts show that – contrary to the declared objectives – the measures planned by the Polish government and supported by the World Bank will not make the Lower Oder, and the city of Szczecin in particular, safer from flooding. Detailed findings will be presented during the **Polish-German conference on “Nature-friendly flood protection on the Lower Oder” on 20 June 2018 in the border town of Słubice**, organised by [Deutscher Naturschutzring \(DNR\) e.V.](#) of Germany in co-operation with Poland's [Save the Rivers Coalition \(KRR\)](#).

One of the reports analyses the plans, which have raised controversy since they were first proposed, to upgrade the Międzyodrze area and transform it into a managed polder. The report demonstrates that the polder's real usable area and capacity are much smaller than the governmental experts claimed in the loan request to the World Bank and correspond to a mere 5% of the initially declared value.

According to **Artur Furdyna**, the Coalition's ichthyology expert from the Association of Friends of the Rivers Ina and Gowienica (TPRIIG) who has worked in the Oder Delta for many years: *“Our documents show that the **planned upgrade of Międzyodrze cannot significantly lower the height of flood waves, and the planned polder will have no effect in terms of improving Szczecin's flood protection.** Międzyodrze, however, may lose its very important function as a natural wet polder. Moreover, the government and the World Bank did not take into account the impacts of the Szczecin-Świnoujście waterway upgrade. “A deeper and wider waterway will increase the likelihood of water from the Baltic Sea entering the Szczecin Lagoon during storms and increasing the water levels in the Oder. Given the rising sea level, this will significantly affect the flood protection of Szczecin and the entire Szczecin Lagoon coast”* –Furdyna adds.

The World Bank is also supporting the government's flood protection concept for the border section of the Oder, which the experts dismiss as 'faux'. It envisages regulation of the river by reconstruction and expansion of groynes all along the river section in question to facilitate the operation of icebreakers. The findings of the Polish-German reports for this section of the Oder demonstrate that the concept fails to take into account the specific river flow conditions, in view of which the concept is irrational. *“Dredging the river will not increase its effective depth because the peaks of the naturally uneven profile of the sandy river bottom will*

become higher. As a result, the river's parameters for icebreakers will not improve. At the same time, increased mobility of sediment will significantly deteriorate the river's ecological condition" - explains **Artur Furdyna**.

*"The concerns expressed already two years ago by environmental organisations, a large group of academics and the Greens are materialising. A public investment is being justified with the need to facilitate the operation of icebreakers or upgrade Międzyodrze, which has been functioning flawlessly, but these are just pretexts to spend public money on the construction of an inland waterway, and have nothing to do with real flood protection - says **Radosław Gawlik**.*

*"The city of Wrocław has already implemented a lot of flood protection measures, but we still cannot feel safe, as the 2010 flood that caused so much damage in the Kozanów district showed. This will not change until the government implements across-the-board solutions that give the rivers their floodplains back in a reasonable way and treat whole river basins in a comprehensive way, as the other EU countries are doing in line with the Water Framework Directive and current river science" – argues **Paweł Pomian** of the Greens and EKO-UNIA.*

The project is dubious, and its cost is estimated at **close to 4.8 billion PLN**. In 2015, the Polish government signed a contract for a **World Bank loan** to finance the measures. Of that, **more than 1.8 billion PLN** is destined for works on the Oder.

Dr Joanna Kubicka, an economist of the University of Business in Wrocław who co-operates with EKO-UNIA, comments: *"There are much better and cheaper ways to improve flood protection. Based on expert analyses, we are warning that the solutions selected are purely technical, not optimal, and will likely cause more harm than good. And when we say 'protection', we mean both people and their property, and ecosystems whose destruction will cost us dearly.*

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