

10 Frequently Asked Questions about a River Commission International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

1) What is the legal basis of the Commission?

The ICPDR's legal basis is the "Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable use of the Danube River (Danube River Protection Convention)", generally referred to as the "Danube River Protection Convention" or "DRPC".

It commits the contracting parties (Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and the European Union) to unify their efforts in sustainable water management, including conservation of surface and groundwater, pollution reduction, and the prevention and control of floods, accidents and ice hazards.

The convention was signed in Sofia in 1994 and came into force in October 1998. It can be found online [here](#).

2) What are the key functions of the Commission?

The key objectives of the ICPDR and the DRPC include the following aims to:

- Ensure sustainable water management
- Ensure conservation, improvement and rational use of surface waters and groundwater
- Control pollution and reduce inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances
- Control floods and ice hazards.

The ICPDR also facilitates cooperation between the Danube countries and the Black Sea region in issues requiring coordination. Furthermore, it cooperates with other international organisations where appropriate to address new challenges related to water management (e.g. climate change adaptation) as they emerge. As of its adoption in 2000, a commitment to implementing the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD) is also central to the activities of all CPDR members, including non-EU members.

3) How is the Commission managed?

Each ICPDR contracting party has its own Head of Delegation, and decisions are sought through consensus between representatives at two annual meetings chaired by the ICPDR

President: the ‘Ordinary Meeting’, held in Vienna in December, while another meeting is held in June in the country that currently holds the Presidency. The ICPDR Presidency is passed on from one country to another in an alphabetical order every year.

The ICPDR has a Permanent Secretariat to support its work, supervised by an Executive Secretary. The Secretariat has its headquarters at the United Nations city (VIC) building in Vienna.

There are 9 permanent staff members and additional short-term project staff at the secretariat. If all national experts, delegates from observers and consultants are considered, there are more than 300 people working with and for the ICPDR.

Note: the ICPDR organizational chart in Figure 1 on the next page.

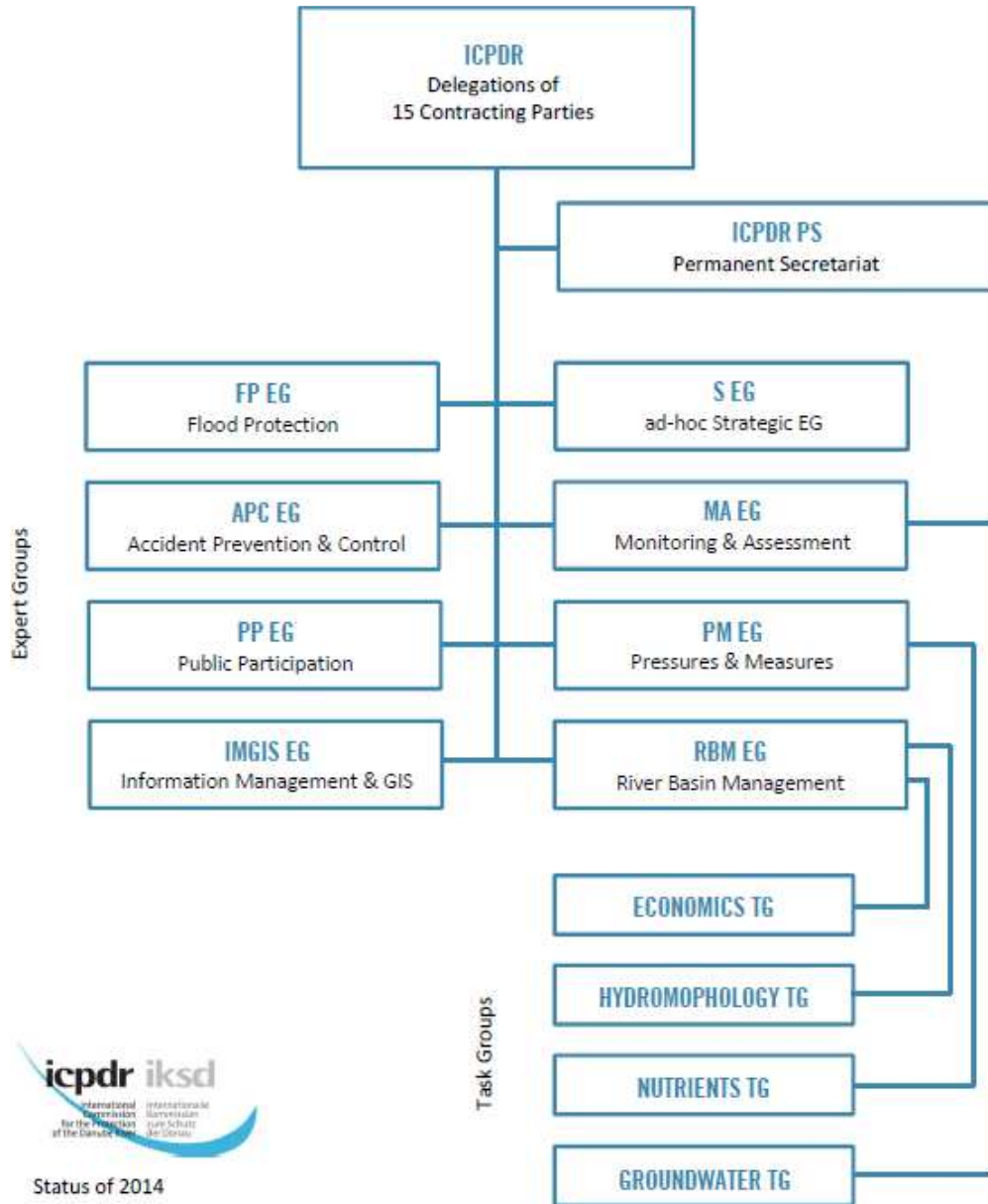


Fig. 1: Organizational chart of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), status of 2014.

4) How is the Commission financed?

The ICPDR budget comes from the contributions of the Contracting Parties. According to the DRPC, the Contracting Parties (except for the EU) shall contribute an equal share, unless unanimously decided otherwise by the ICPDR. Some exceptions are currently applied for a transitional period. The total annual budget of the ICPDR is a little more than one million Euros.

In some cases, the ICPDR engages in projects that have separate sources of funding. These include projects funded by the European Union, the United Nations Development Program, GEF, and individual member countries.

5) What are the means of organising the work of the Commission?

Expert Groups (EG) and Task Groups (TG) form the basis of the Commission's working structure. EGs and TGs are composed of at least one national expert per contracting party as well as representatives from interested observer organisations.

As of 2020, there are also 24 observers to the ICPDR who represent the interests of stakeholders, ranging from other intergovernmental organisations and environmental NGOs, to representatives of the business sector, active in areas such as navigation, hydropower, or tourism. While national experts have a vote in expert group meetings, observers contribute to the discussions, but have no formal vote. Draft decisions seek approval at the annual Ordinary Meeting.

The daily operational work is coordinated or conducted by the staff of the permanent secretariat. There is constant exchange between delegations, expert groups and the Secretariat.

6) What are the role and responsibilities of the Secretariat staff and how are staff members selected?

The Executive Secretary (ES) and Technical Experts (TEs), currently make up a core staff of about 6 individuals, and their roles are determined by the DRPC.

Executive Secretary: performs the functions necessary to administer the DRPC and for the work of the ICPDR in accordance with its Rules of Procedure and its Financial Regulations. The ES supervises the staff at the secretariat and ensures the day-to-day operation of the Commission in consultation with the President.

Technical Expert for River Basin Management: provides guidance and coordination to ICPDR activities related to the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in the Danube River Basin.

Technical Expert for Pollution Control: supports ICPDR activities to reduce or eliminate, as far as possible, pollution from point and diffuse sources, and other significant pressures.

Technical Expert for Water Quality: develops and coordinates the actions needed under the EU Floods Directive and provides the ICPDR with information related to the state of the waters in the Danube River Basin and organises monitoring programs or the compilation of monitoring information.

Technical Expert for Public Participation and Communication: supports and provides input to ICPDR activities regarding public participation and outreach issues including awareness raising measures and is in charge of coordinating ICPDR communication activities.

Technical Expert for Information Management and GIS: supports ICPDR activities related to the operation and further development of the ICPDR information system. It comprises control over the development, implementation, testing and maintenance of a common Danube River Basin Geographical Information System (DRB GIS).

Technical Expert for GIS: supports ICPDR activities related to a common Danube River Basin Geographical Information System (DRB GIS).

The selection of the secretariat staff is based on an open competition among persons from the countries of the region (including the EU). The selection procedure includes the assessment of the application material by Heads of Delegations, a panel interview and additional tests where appropriate. In addition, the secretariat has support staff and interns recruited by the Executive Secretary.

Members of the Secretariat serve the interests of the Commission and do not represent their respective countries of nationality.

7) What are the role and responsibilities of the Delegations?

All key decisions are made by the delegations of the contracting parties. Delegations have the obligation to ensure input from other government agencies in their respective countries. This can include regional governments or the various ministries that play a role in specific water management issues. For example, a delegation may comprise civil servants from a ministry of the environment; however, navigation issues can also affect objectives of a Ministry of Transport. In such a case, the delegation should keep the overall national interest in mind, including those of its fellow ministries.

8) What is the role of the Commission in managing projects?

The ICPDR's role in managing projects is largely limited to supporting and advising its partners to achieve core goals. Occasionally it plays a facilitator role for the implementation of different components through its Expert Groups. The ICPDR also acts as a forum for developing projects and ideas to be carried out by others.

9) What are the most important ICPDR activities?

In a nutshell, the ICPDR:

1. assesses the state of surface and ground waters in the Danube River Basin;
2. develops actions to conserve or improve these waters;
3. collects information on the implementation and progress of these actions; and
4. supports individual contracting parties or other relevant entities in the implementation efforts of these actions.

10) What does the ICPDR do to assist in the prevention of disputes?

The ICPDR serves as a platform for cooperation and coordination . The signing of the convention, however, commits the countries under international law to some specific actions and to uphold certain principles. In some past disputes, the ICPDR was able to contribute towards the harmonisation of efforts by providing a platform for discussion.

The convention provides a dispute settlement mechanism, but in practice this has not been necessary thus far, as the countries concerned have worked to ensure dialogue and developed consensus on issues of conflict. The work of the ICPDR is less prone to disputes than outsiders might imagine. The atmosphere at meetings is focused on facts and characterised by mutual respect and a common acknowledgement of the ICPDR's objectives and tasks.

Further Questions

For further information, please see the website of the ICPDR at www.icpdr.org or contact the commission's permanent secretariat at secretariat@icpdr.org