

This is part of a series of case studies that WBCSD has developed to mark the World Water Day 2021, on the theme of valuing water. The case studies showcase examples from a cross-section of WBCSD's membership on how they value water. The aim is to highlight the various dimensions of valuing water and how businesses integrate it into their strategy, operations and decision making.



## CASE STUDY 4

# Multi-stakeholder engagement to drive sustainability of Meuse river basin



Dunea is a drinking water company operating in South Holland, serving to 17 municipalities and approximately 1.3 million customers. Dunea's sustainability values reflect in the company's vision of producing high-quality products and services in harmony with nature. The company's strategy is to work on future proofing in a world that is urbanizing, digitizing and must become more sustainable.



EDF Group is a world leader in electricity production, with a historical background of public services, providing energy and innovative service to more than 38 million customers worldwide. EDF is a major player in the French electricity market and has a significant presence worldwide. As part of its commitment to sustainability, EDF aims to build a net-zero energy future with electricity and innovative services to help save the planet and drive wellbeing and economic development.

### Key driver for valuing water

Dunea and EDF both depend on the Meuse basin for their operations and delivery of their products and services.

Meuse is an international river that flows through France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, and serves different purposes for different users as it flows through these countries. In Belgium and the Netherlands, the Meuse is an important source for drinking water serving a total of 7 million people. Upstream on the French side, it serves the irrigation and tourism sectors. North of the border with Belgium, the Meuse is important for both cooling and industrial processes, including a nuclear power plant. Towards the east in the Eifel (region) in Germany, reservoirs have an important water management function including preventing floods and droughts, generation of electricity and production of drinking water. Furthermore, the Meuse's canalized and dammed water system is of growing importance for transportation and navigation in north-west Europe. And finally, chemical and other industries use the Meuse throughout the basin

for processing water, shipping and discharging wastewater (both industrial and communal).

The Meuse catchment area has been facing increasing challenges. Climate change projections in the Meuse basin generally point to increasing temperatures and increased and more intense periods of droughts with reduction in water flows. In addition, the demand for water from various users is increasing. Under these circumstances, where water availability diminishes and demand increases, continuing with business-as-usual will not be an option for long.

The key driver for valuing water in this case is the need to protect the river in the face of increasing pressure on quality and reducing flows. The purpose of valuing water is to investigate if the different users of the river Meuse (who never really had to work together before) have a common interest in dealing with the effects of climate change on the river Meuse and to see if there is a need and consensus for joint action.

### Bringing water users together to implement the Valuing water principles

In 2018, the High-Level Panel on Water (HLPW) convened by the United Nations and the World Bank Group defined the 5 principles of valuing water recommending that we all understand, value and manage water better.

In 2019, drawing inspiration from the Valuing water principles, and with companies Dunea and EDF playing a leading role, the users of water in the Meuse basin began working towards future-proofing the Meuse basin.



- An inventory was made of all the important water users and stakeholders in the Meuse catchment area.
- Drinking water utilities that depend on the Meuse basin organized “Meuse Symposium” in October 2019 in Maastricht, the Netherlands. The symposium, facilitated by RIWA-Meuse, allowed an exchange on the impact of water shortage on different users within the international Meuse basin. 20 large users of water from different countries that share Meuse water discussed their challenges, interests, opportunities and concerns about the status and overall management of the Meuse. For some users, a total or partial shutdown of business operations due to lack of water, is in reality a serious jeopardy which can mount up to a loss of millions of euros per day.

## 5 Principles to value water



**Recognize and embrace water's multiple values to different groups and interests in all decisions affecting water;**



**Reconcile values and build trust – conduct all processes to reconcile values in ways that are equitable, transparent and inclusive;**



**Protect the sources, including watersheds, rivers, aquifers, associated ecosystems, and used water flows for current and future generations;**



**Educate to empower – promote education and awareness among all stakeholders about the intrinsic value of water and its essential role in all aspects of life;**



**Invest and innovate – ensure adequate investment in institutions, infrastructure, information and innovation to realize the many benefits derived from water and reduce risks.**

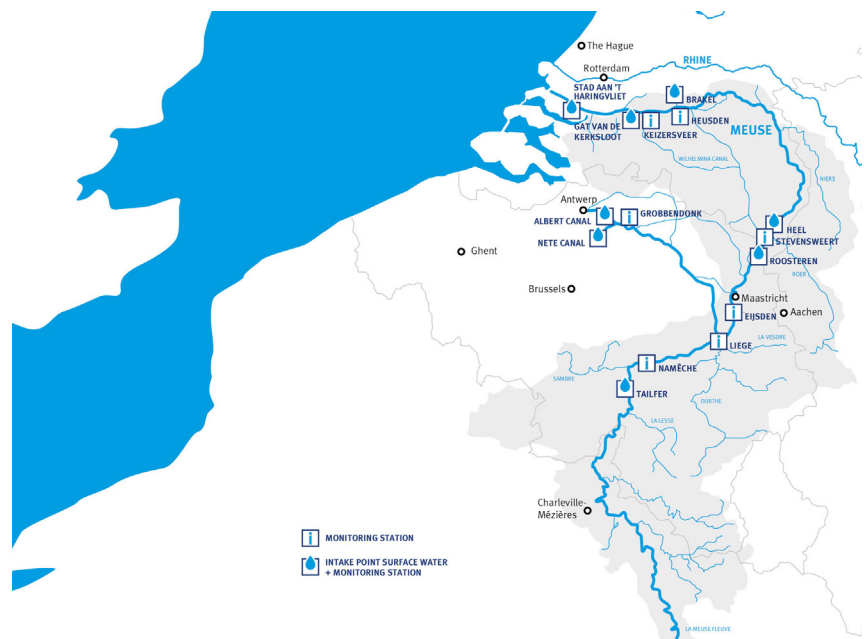
### Users' commitment to working together and call to basin-wide action

From the Meuse Symposium, the users acknowledged their dependence on the Meuse river and the need to act jointly to preserve the river for its various uses. The users expressed a strong willingness and commitment to working together on this agenda.

At an own level, the different users of the Meuse water have been making efforts to reduce their impact on the river by switching to alternative sources such as groundwater, reusing the river water, reducing wastewater discharge and investing in climate-resilient infrastructure wherever possible.

Equally important, but outside the authority of the users, are the conditions of transboundary regulatory frameworks that seek to optimize the use of the Meuse river. The users of the Meuse water recognize that:

- A basin-wide assessment framework should be established to prioritize water use to provide clarity to users and stimulate efficient water use. In addition, coordinated transboundary crisis planning should be done to address the critical needs in times of water shortage.
- Investments and the planning of measures by governments and users to deal with water shortage should be coordinated within the Meuse basin to ensure that financial resources in planning and management are optimally utilized and that smart and sustainable measures are put in place.



- It is important to ensure that the existing agreements are respected and that new ones are developed between the countries regarding the division of water.

## Next steps and lessons learnt

Bringing the stakeholders together and sharing stories on how each of them value the Meuse, opened a channel of communication and action between the various stakeholders. This strategically helped mainstream the current and future challenges of the Meuse and identify a way forward to engage with such challenges in a proactive and integrated manner.

As a key next step, the users of the Meuse water call on the governments of the 4 countries to join forces to address the challenges the Meuse is facing by:

- Setting these as priority in the political agenda.
- Taking a basin-wide approach so that the current and the future needs of all the involved countries and users are

considered and integrated solutions are developed.

With the conference a first step is made in the valuing water journey of the river Meuse basin. The challenge for the future is to continue this journey and go from words to action.

## Contact

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