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Press release by ERN, July 10, 2015

Big Jump, the third European River Swimming Day, 12 July, 3 p.m. (GMT +2)

Jump into Europe's waters and make EU water policy work

Brussels, 10 July 2015

On 12 July, at 3pm, thousands of people across Europe will take part in a simultaneous "Big Jump" to claim the right of all European citizens to have access to clean waters. Some 500 Big Jump events are taking place in 28 European countries.

The event, organised by the European Rivers Network (ERN) and supported by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), WWF, Good Planet Belgium and over 200 national coordinators, marks the end of the first cycle of the EU Water Framework Directive which came into force 15 years ago. The Water Framework Directive set EU countries the goal of achieving a healthy aquatic environment by 2015. But the goal is far from being achieved as only 53% of European waters are in a 'good status'. Sixty young River Ambassadors selected from 18 countries will be meeting EU policymakers to call for more action on 13 July as part of the "Big Jump Challenge" youth campaign.

This year's event is the third "Big Jump" European River Swimming Day following on from those held in 2005 and 2010.

Roberto Epple, Big Jump initiator and President of the European Rivers Network (ERN), said:

"The Big Jump is an inspiring project that embodies the essence of current EU water protection legislation in a single public act. A legislative tool like the Water Frame Directive is a crucial instrument to protect Europe's rivers but needs citizens' support;!"

The WFD goals are not yet within reach; about half of the waters will need an extra six to 12 years to be considered as clean.

Michael Bender, Head of Water Policy at the German Big Jump Partner GRÜNE LIGA, explained:

"Some efforts have been made to improve the quality of our waters but with regard to nutrient pollution and pesticides we still need a breakthrough in the Common Agricultural Policy to tackle this problem. Further, there are huge hydropower development programmes in the pipeline that will destroy large parts of the still widely untouched wild rivers especially in the Balkans. Fortunately, the European Court recently made it clear that the no deterioration principle is not just a general statement but applies to individual projects that must comply with the WFD."

It is however to be feared that, even by 2027 - the very latest deadline - not all waters will be clean and fit for bathing. We will be passing on a terrible legacy to the next generation, the youth of today.

That is why young people from across Europe intend to highlight the importance of water protection at a special 'European River Parliament' event being held on 13 July from 3pm-4:30 pm at the European Parliament in Brussels.

As part of the 'Big Jump Challenge' 60 young 'river ambassadors' - selected from over 70 youth campaign groups from 28 countries – will bring their ideas and demands on water protection to the attention of policymakers in Brussels, and invite them to taste water cocktails from their local rivers.

Rafael Ziegler, environmental philosopher and co-initiator of the Youth Campaign 'Big Jump Challenge, said:

“'Jump for the future' is the slogan of one of the participating teams from Berlin. As the economic crisis continues to push people apart and pit countries against each other, the Big Jump Challenge brings young people across Europe together in small acts of concrete solidarity.”

Pieter de Pous, EU Policy Director at EEB concluded:

“Europe's commitment to cleaning up and restoring its rivers shows how the EU can work for its citizens, improve their quality of life and support the environment. Today's European leaders should remember this and act on it when debating Europe's future.”

For further information:

- Big Jump (general): <http://www.bigjump.org> (English, French German)
 - Big Jump Challenge (Youth Action, a part of the Big Jump www.bigjumpchallenge.net)
 - Roberto Epple, President ERN, roberto.epple@ern.org (Big Jump Initiator +33 6 08 62 12 67)
 - Rafael Ziegler, Big Jump Challenge, rzeigler@uni-greifswald.de +49 (0) 3834 86 4199
 - Michael Bender, Grüne Liga wasser@grueneliga.de
 - Philippa Nuttall Jones, EEB Senior Communications Officer, philippa.jones@eeb.org
- If you wish to register for the European River Parliament event, please confirm your attendance asap to Anna de Grauw, judith.sargentini-office@ep.europa.eu +32 (0) 2 28 38881

Notes to editors:

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) has been in force since 2000 and aims to protect all European waters (inland surface waters, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater). Under the Directive, Member States are obliged to prevent further deterioration and to enhance and restore the status of aquatic ecosystems as well as terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands that directly depend on aquatic ecosystems. The purpose is to achieve “good ecological and chemical status” by 2015.

For the first time an EU Directive has addressed not only the chemical aspects of water protection but also its ecological aspects, such as flow regime, composition and abundance of aquatic organisms etc. This means, for example, that the WFD will help rivers to function like rivers, instead of being mere transport canals, as they have become in many parts of Europe. The Directive thus promotes integrated river basin management – considering the balanced use of all waters draining into a single point from the hills to the sea - as the most efficient way to achieve sustainable water use. This, in turn, requires coordinated planning for using land and water resources within the entire river basin covering all surface, coastal and ground waters as well as land-use activities.

Socio-economic benefits from Water Framework Directive implementation include: protection of human health through better quality of drinking and bathing waters; lower costs for water uses by reducing treatment and remediation costs (e.g. drinking water supply); mitigation of impacts from climate change and ensuring security of water supplies; promotion of new sustainable jobs (e.g. in ecotourism, fisheries and nature conservation sector); and improvement of the quality of life by increasing the recreational value of surface waters (e.g. for water sports).

Link to the official WFD implementation web sites of the EU Member States, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html