



## JOINT POSITION FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN



Apoio:



The future of shared river ecosystems and Iberian communities depends on effective and transparent transborder Iberian cooperation to reduce pressures and restore river habitats and biodiversity, preventing the construction of new barriers to river connectivity and reinforcing the involvement of civil society in decision-making.

Funded by the **MAVA Foundation**, the *Reconnecting Iberian Rivers* project allowed European environmental organizations to work on a joint vision for more effective and transparent cross-border cooperation in shared river basins between Portugal and Spain.

The Albufeira Convention is a powerful instrument for achieving this vision, but it is urgent to implement it effectively.

We envision a fair, transparent, and participatory management of the hydrographic basins shared between Portugal and Spain, which allows Iberian society to be more resilient to the effects of climate change and the conservation of species and habitats.

We propose that the future cooperation on the transboundary rivers between Portugal and Spain should focus on the following measures:

## **Better Governance**

**For available water to be shared fairly and rationally among all water users and without compromising the proper functioning of riverside ecosystems.**

- Clarification and improvement of roles and legal responsibilities of the Albufeira Convention in managing and coordinating the shared river basins.
- Strengthening the role of the secretariat of the Albufeira Convention and improve transparency.
- Integration of RBM plans with other policy domains like biodiversity, environment, agriculture, and secure coherence between these policies.
- Active communication and promotion of river basin management planning to ensure stakeholders are engaged and involved and to build trust between stakeholders.
- Organise regular meetings for each of the river basins to report on progress of the PoM's and to ensure coordination between the execution of the PoM's between Portuguese and Spanish authorities.
- Decentralise decision making for river basin management at the Portuguese side by establishing basin committees to ensure more and better stakeholder involvement.
- Ensure that finances are sufficient to implement the plans (PoM).
- Improve the data collection and analysis network by ensuring its availability and accessibility for all stakeholders, in an organized and permanently updated online platform.
- Ensuring that water costs for agriculture, industry and other uses reflect the real costs of water security.
- Foster the transition to a regenerative agriculture, less dependent on water.
- Promote greater water and energy efficiency and renewable energies with reduced environmental impact.
- Ensure the correct application of legal instruments for cross-border cooperation (e.g. Albufeira Convention), as well as the regular revision and improvement of them.

# Ecological Conservation and Restoration

## Rehabilitation of the river landscape, considering its natural and social capital.

- Improve river connectivity through:
  - Removal of obsolete or unsafe barriers with negative ecological impact
  - Alternatives to the construction of new barriers
  - Avoid the construction of new barriers
  - Ensure the passage of fish fauna and sediments in all barriers in use
- Implement new criteria for assessing fluvial connectivity, such as the extension of free rivers and the density of native species
- Promote local and regional river landscape rehabilitation programs
- Invest in techniques that enhance soil and water retention in hydrographic basins, through improved land use management
- Acting at the Iberian level in the prevention and control of the spread of invasive species
- Implement joint programs for the reintroduction and conservation of native species
- Ensure the ecological flow regime, implementing estimation methods based on habitat preference
- Ensuring that water quality meets agreed ecological standards by implementing more effective pollution mitigation and control measures

## Social role of rivers

### Bringing together and involving Iberian populations in the protection and safeguarding of river ecosystems

- Raise awareness of the importance of rivers as ecosystems essential to well-being and quality of life in the context of climate change
- Promoting traditions, professions, and the cultural and recreational use of rivers
- Ensuring that the population and decision-makers are informed, speak and act on issues related to their rivers

## CONCLUSION

Effective Iberian cooperation will ensure healthy river ecosystems, which provide essential goods such as water and food, ensuring the conservation of biodiversity and protection services against droughts and floods, as well as enabling activities such as fishing, tourism, and leisure.

The update of the Albufeira Convention and its practical application will allow for a more productive collaboration between Portugal and Spain, creating greater resilience to climate change, and greater participation of the population in decisions regarding the management of water resources.