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French-Chinese Cooperation on integrated water resources management for the pilot Hai River Basin and the Zhou sub-basin

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Access to water has become a major concern in China. It has indeed only 7% of the water resources of the planet for one fifth of the world population.

The location of these resources is also uneven between South, West and Northern China. Water quality is threatened by pollution from industrial, urban and agricultural effluent discharges.

To address these challenges, China is building huge infrastructure and modernizing its water management methods.

The Chinese Government is developing international cooperation, including with the European Union and its Member States.

An agreement was signed on 21 December 2009 by the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources and the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, to develop cooperation in areas of common interest of Integrated Water Resources Management and Protection.

As part of this agreement, the Hai River Basin, which extends over 318,000 km² and covers four Provinces (Hebei, Shanxi, Henan, Inner Mongolia) and two large Municipalities (Beijing and Tianjin), was selected in order to develop a pilot project for cooperation between the two countries.

The achievement of this cooperation and technical assistance project between 2011 and 2015 will address the following objectives :

- * Learning from each other and sharing the experience of both countries in integrated water resources management at the basin level ;
- * Exchanges on policies and measures to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems, as well as on the implementation of "polluter-pays" mechanisms ;
- * Testing in the pilot basin the development of tools for integrated water resources management, adapted to the context, in terms of institutional arrangements and technical solutions to address the major challenges of river basin management.

The project especially aims at testing the application in China of some mechanisms for basin management, water pollution control and protection of aquatic ecosystems, used in France since the Law of 1964 that created the Water Agencies.

The project partners are, on the Chinese side, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Commission for Hai River Conservation and the Water Boards of Tianjin City and Hebei Province, and, on the French side, the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport and Lodging (MEDDTL), the Seine-Normandy Water Agency, the Interdepartmental Sanitation Syndicate of Greater Paris (SIAAP), the Interdepartmental Institution of Great Lakes of the Seine and the International Office for Water (IOWater) which takes care of the project technical coordination.

Phases of the cooperation agreement

The project is developing in two phases :

- * The first cooperation phase, following the memorandum of understanding signed on 4 July 2011 in Beijing, allowed better knowing on both sides the functioning of the basin institutions and the procedures and means they are implementing in France and China,

The French experts' assignments in China allowed making a first assessment of the Hai River Basin and training 70 Chinese counterparts of the basin on the basin management tools used in France. Meanwhile, three Chinese delegations were received in the Seine - Normandy basin.

* A second phase (April 2012 - April 2015) has just been launched on the occasion of the World Water Forum in Marseilles, on 12 March 2012.

This second phase will allow testing in the Zhou River sub-basin some French methods whose relevance has been identified in the first phase and which especially focus on :

- Basin management, by establishing general planning for integrated management of the Zhou river basin.
- Technical development, with proposed solutions and measures to address pollution and eutrophication, for the protection and restoration of aquatic environments, the monitoring of water quality and a warning system,
- Strengthening know-how with the organization of training programmes in China and France.

A jointly-prepared multiannual and practical action plan will specify the requirements in expertise and training, a three-year realistic implementation schedule and a cost estimate of cooperation for both parties.