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of Deutsche Umwelthilfe  
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## Press Release

### **14 July 2002** First International Elbe Swimming Day:

**Hamburg / Dresden :** A few years ago, the Elbe river was one of the most polluted river in Europe. Since the reunification of Germany, hundrets of millions of euros have been spent on a wide restoration programme, including the building of more than 200 water treatment units : what used to be a sewer has turned into a river in which one can swim.

To celebrate this event, more than 10,000 people are expected to gather on a 1,000 km stretch of the Elbe river, on more than 50 swimming spots from the North Sea (Hamburg) to the Elbe source in the Giant Mountains (Czech Republic) on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2002 at 2 PM.

On 14 July 2002, the First International Elbe Swimming Day (Elbe Badetag), announced by the Deutsche Umwelthilfe (German Environmental Aid Association) and the international printing and publishing corporation Gruner + Jahr will take place. This outstanding event symbolises the reconciliation of the Elbe river with the people living nearby.

The success of the wide restoration programme is largely due to the huge self-cleaning capacity of the river, a result of the conservation of its freeflowing nature, no dam having been built over 700 km from Dresden to Hamburg, and the protection of its floodable areas.

“In 1989, the quality of the water in the river Elbe was 20 years behind the Rhine water. Now the water quality of the two rivers is almost the same”, says Prof. Dr. Heinrich Reincke, Director of the Wassergütestelle Elbe (Elbe Water Quality Monitoring Agency) and partner of the project “Living Elbe”.

This means that it is worth investing on rivers and water protection. The Elbe river has become one of the most beautiful rivers in Europe. It flows through four National Parks, two UNESCO biospheres (one stretching over 400 km) and other protected areas. Salmons and 40 other fish species are back and the Elbe is once again a source of quality of life. For people, fauna and flora.

The First International Elbe Swimming Day is a project of the “Living Elbe” campaign. It meets great enthusiasm and hundreds of NGOs, local authorities, environmental and sports groups as well as private companies are taking part in this celebration of the river. Attractive programmes for various Elbe parties and celebrations have been organized.



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According to Roberto Epple, Living Elbe project leader: "The Elbe is coming out from the darkness in which it had been sinking since World War II. People were living with their back to the river, it stunk and was covered with poisonous foam, children were forbidden to come close to it, there were no fishermen, no life.

Today people are rediscovering their river. This re-conquest that we are celebrating is a first essential step towards a long-term living Elbe, in the framework of a global sustainable development project."

The DLRG (German Rescue Association) will be present at all the allocated swimming sites. The media partner of the whole event is "NDR, Norddeutscher Rundfunk" which will participate with numerous special TV and radio programmes as well as several local actions.

The Elbe Swimming Day is part of the "Living Elbe" project and is organised by the Deutsche Umwelthilfe in co-operation with the publishing house Gruner + Jahr. The main objectives of the "Living Elbe" project are : promoting the Elbe landscape to UNESCO World Heritage status, connecting all the actors working on the Elbe river basin, as well as developing a global sustainable development concept.

For further questions:

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More info : <http://www.rivernet.org/elbeswimmingday.htm>  
<http://www.elbebadetag.de>

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