

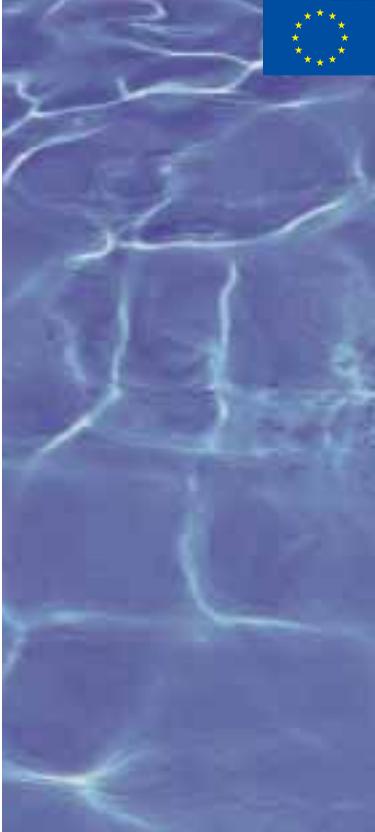


*The Water Framework Directive*

# Tap into it !



**European Commission**





## *The Water Framework Directive*

# **Water is essential to life**

**W**ater is essential to life on the planet. Our very existence as well as our economic activities are totally dependent upon this precious resource. And yet, at a global level water is often a limited resource.

### ***Key Facts about the Global Water Situation***

- Less than 1% of the planet's water is available for human consumption.
- More than 1.2 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.

Compared to the situation in some parts of the world, the status of European water resources is relatively favourable: the continent faces no overall water shortages, and extreme water problems such as droughts and floods are rare. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Europe's water quality is far from satisfactory.

### ***Key Facts about the European Water Situation***

- 20% of all surface water in the European Union is seriously threatened with pollution.
- Groundwater supplies around 65% of all Europe's drinking water.
- 60% of European cities overexploit their groundwater resources.
- 50% of wetlands have "endangered status" due to groundwater over-exploitation.
- The area of irrigated land in Southern Europe has increased by 20% since 1985.

Given the numerous and increasing pressures on our water resources, it is vital that effective legislative instruments clearly address the problems and help secure these resources for future generations.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) expands the scope of water protection to all waters and sets clear objectives that a "good status" must be achieved for all European waters by 2015 and that water use be sustainable throughout Europe. This new overarching system is quite timely as Europe's water resources are facing increasing pressures. There is no time like the present to tackle the challenges and help secure our water resources for today and for future generations.



### ***Bringing together everyone with an interest***

To develop this legislation, hundreds of experts were brought in – from industry and agriculture to environmental and consumer organisations to local and national authorities. This co-operation is key because water provides the basis for a whole range of activities from agriculture and fishing to power generation, industry, transport and tourism. Who better than representatives from and consumers of these activities to advise on the development of policy that will affect all of us and them as well?

This lengthy and open consultation period led to a broad agreement around the Directive's objectives and measures, as well as clear deadlines for implementation period. The Directive also requires co-operation across countries and encourages citizens, NGOs and authorities at all levels of government to get more involved, thus helping to ensure that the demanding timetable will be met.

### ***How will it work?***

The new Directive represents an ambitious and innovative approach to water management. Key elements of the legislation include:

- The protection of all waters - rivers, lakes, coastal waters and groundwaters.
- The setting of ambitious objectives to ensure that all waters meet “good status” by 2015.
- The requirement for cross border co-operation between countries and all involved parties.
- Ensuring the active participation of all stakeholders, including NGOs and local communities, in water management activities.
- Requiring water pricing policies and ensuring that the polluter pays.
- Balancing the interests of the environment with those who depend on it.

This brochure is intended to provide an overview on the goals and provisions of the European Water Framework Directive.

## Water knows **no borders**

Anyone who has visited the large European river basins like the Danube and the Rhine knows that water does not stop at borders. If that's the case, then the best way to manage water is through international co-operation. The EU learned from experience gained in various regions throughout Europe like the basin of the Rhine where a long-standing tradition of international co-operation exists. The Water Framework Directive requires that all partners in a given river basin manage their waters together in close co-operation. It stipulates that countries set up a common River Basin

Management Plan with measures to ensure that the ambitious objectives of the Directive will be met within the given deadlines.

These plans will be designed and implemented by river basin – the natural geological and hydrological unit which brings together upstream and downstream interests: local, regional, national authorities as well as stakeholders – including NGOs. In essence, the WFD aims to create new solidarity around water management within river basins.



### **The Elbe River: The salmon is back**

For years the Elbe River was ranked amongst the most polluted rivers in Europe. Following political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic, Germany and the European Community agreed, in 1990, to set up the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe. Based on common principles and approaches agreed after a series of studies, the countries in the Elbe basin have already achieved considerable success. Indeed, the salmon – one of the indicators of clean water – is back again in the Elbe basin. The successes achieved by these countries will surely be broadened by the fact that two other countries will now join the project. Together, all the countries in the basin will work towards achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.



# Water is **everybody's** issue

Just as different countries will have to co-operate to protect water resources, so will various actors from different sectors. As we all use water in our personal lives and in our work (whether in a factory, farm or office), it is important to involve all of us to accomplish the legislation's objectives. That is why the Directive encourages all with an interest to actively participate in water management activities. The more we understand how we affect water quantity and quality, the more we can help do our part to protect our precious water resources. The Water Framework Directive encourages all citizens to get involved to protect and manage their waters.

After all, it was a combination of citizens groups and decision-makers who participated in the process of developing the legislation. The next step is the design of a "River Basin Management plan", which will include an analysis of the river basin's characteristics, a review of the impact that human activity has on water, as well as an economic analysis of the water use. Then, working together with stakeholders and users, measures will be adopted and implemented.



This co-operation amongst stakeholders such as NGOs, local communities and various levels of public authorities during all phases of the implementation is crucial to ensure the whole process is carried out efficiently and transparently. And this involvement must continue so that there is a balance of interests between environment and those who depend on it.

## **WWF – partnering to raise awareness**

In 2000-2001 the WWF European Freshwater Programme, with financial support from the European Commission, organised a series of three seminars each dealing with a specific key issue for the implementation of the WFD: (1) *Water and agriculture*, (2) *The role of wetlands in integrated river basin management* and (3) *Good practice in river basin planning*.

The main objectives of these seminars were: to provide information and the opportunity for debate on the Directive, while addressing the need for greater transparency and public awareness, to facilitate the sharing of experiences and expertise, and the identification of "good practice" for implementing key elements of the legislation. A first practical resource document of the seminars has been produced and can be found at:

[www.panda.org/europe/freshwater/seminars/seminar.html](http://www.panda.org/europe/freshwater/seminars/seminar.html)



# Water is a **fragile resource**

## The burden of chemical accidents

The contamination of rivers through chemical accidents illustrates – dramatically – the connection between various parts of the ecosystem and different human uses for water. A case in point is the accident in the Sandoz warehouse in Basle, Switzerland in 1986. The water used to put out the fire was contaminated with mercury, organophosphate pesticides and other chemicals. This water then found its way into the Rhine causing massive pollution and the death of half a million fish, and it was detected all the way down to Holland. The drinking water supply feeding 9 million people along the Rhine had to be interrupted immediately.

An incident upstream impacted the entire downstream of the river and as a result, it took some time for the Rhine to fully recover. The accident resulted in a strengthened co-operation amongst affected countries and as a result, fish including the salmon have returned to the Rhine. Similar accidents occurred in the Danube, such as the Baia Mare accident in Romania in the year 2000 or the accident which occurred in 1998 in Aznalcóllar (Andalucia - Spain) where a dam-burst poisoned the environment of the Doñana National Park.

One drop of a hazardous substance can pollute thousands of litres of water. Pollution caused today could remain for generations in our groundwater that we want to use for drinking water. Indeed, water resources are affected by many different water uses including agriculture, industry and households. In essence, the Framework Directive aims to prevent pollution at source and sets out control mechanisms to ensure that all pollution sources are managed in a sustainable way. It protects groundwater and sets ambitious objectives for its quality and quantity. For the aquatic ecosystems of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters, ambitious ecological objectives are also set. Although today much of Europe's groundwater and surface waters are polluted, they should all reach "good status" by the year 2015.





### ***Integration policies***

The protection of the aquatic environment can only be achieved through further integration of the different policy areas. In essence, the WFD encourages, and in some cases requires, the integration of policies and actions that can contribute to improving water quality. For example, whether it be farmers who change agricultural land-use practices to reduce nitrates leakage into groundwater, or industrial producers who invest in new technologies to reduce emissions or consumers who buy environmentally-friendly products (such as biodegradable detergents).

Therefore objectives of sustainable water use in line with the WFD are to be integrated into those of other European policies on agriculture and fisheries, energy, transport, tourism, etc. Where existing legislation fails to solve the problems of good water quality, the Member States must identify where that is the case and design additional measures to satisfy all relevant objectives. These might include stricter

controls on pollution emissions from industry or agriculture for example.

### ***To prevent and control pollution is essential***

In terms of pollution control, the Directive combines two approaches – the best possible reduction of emissions and a minimum quality threshold – to ensure that the objectives of “good ecological quality” of water are met by 2015. This must be achieved by the Member States. The European Commission is preparing “environmental quality standards” defining “good chemical status”. At the same time, emission control measures are being prepared which will range from reduction to phase out of releases into the aquatic environment within a period of 20 years for the worst pollutants in European waters, the “priority hazardous substances”. Again, integration of all available instruments will be necessary for such an ambitious objective to be achieved for the priority substances.



# Using water **sustainably**

Now that we know so many activities affect water, we can understand the importance of conserving water and helping to protect it from pollutants. It is even more important when we realise that demand is continuously

increasing. It is up to us therefore to ensure that the Water Framework Directive is implemented effectively, that there is enough water for future generations and that this water meets high quality standards.

## **Living with water scarcity**

As water shortages increase worldwide, people are looking for ways to re-use wastewater. This makes sense because it allows a double use for the same pumping costs and mandatory wastewater treatment costs. It also reduces the amount of water that must be diverted, thus conserving resources. The only downside is that it lowers the available quantity of water because when re-used water is consumed less water is returned to the natural hydrological system.

Re-use is an important and natural method of managing drainage water. In order to reap the maximum benefit from a given water supply and to help dispose of drainage waters, strategies for water re-use have evolved. That is because many factors must be taken into consideration, from short-term to long-term needs, as well as location-sensitive issues. In dry regions where irrigation water supplies are limited, drainage water can be used as a supplement. However the quality of the drainage water determines which crops can be irrigated. Highly saline drainage water cannot be used to irrigate salt-sensitive crops. It could, however, be re-used on tolerant forages or in saline agriculture-forestry systems.

Indeed, saline drainage water is being increasingly re-used for the irrigation of salt-tolerant crops and trees. As well, where an irrigation project is located near a natural wetland, the drainage water can be re-used in the wetland. Even here, however, precautions have to be taken to ensure that the quality of the drainage water does not harm fish, waterfowl or other wildlife in the wetland and that the amount of water passing through the wetland is sufficient to prevent dangerous concentrations from developing.





# The **fair price** of water

Water is not a commercial product like any other, but should be seen as a precious heritage. And therefore, it is important to give water a price since pricing acts as an incentive to encourage more sustainable use. That is the reason why many European countries have been pricing water for years. Studies show that careful water pricing acts as an incentive for the long-term sustainable use of water resources and one study by the European Environment Agency found that introducing metering brings immediate savings in water use of an estimated 10-25% of consumption.

The WFD requires Member States to develop water-pricing policies where all users contribute in an appropriate way. The principle of the Directive is that the polluter should pay because at the end of the day somebody always has to pay the price for pollution.

The Directive requires River Basin Authorities to develop water pricing systems that are sensitive to the physical, social, institutional and political setting in each location. In other words, studies will be done on the breakdown of costs according to different sectors like households, industry and agriculture and to integrate into these costs the long-term forecasts of investments in infrastructure by the public and private sectors, for example. Consultation exercises will also be conducted so that the final system adopted will bring supply and demand into balance in a manner which is beneficial to the public interest of today and tomorrow. At the same time, because water is so crucial to public health, the Directive will also provide exceptions for less-favoured areas, so that basic services are provided at an affordable price.

## **Making sense of France's water prices**

France is a country that has for years charged for water services. A study was done recently to make sense of water prices. It found that the price of water supply and wastewater services in this country varies from .8 Euro to 3.15 Euro per cubic metre. How is that so?

Several factors explain these price differences including:

- type of equipment at water purification plant,
- drinking water distribution and production system,
- type of collection system for used water and its treatment,
- natural conditions,
- diffusion or spread of population.

## ***Will the Water Framework Directive lead to differing water prices across Europe?***

While the Water Framework Directive aims at efficient water pricing, it does not require one set price for water across the European Union. Prices will differ from area to area depending on factors like those mentioned above as well as others including the internalisation of environmental costs. What will be common is the transparency underpinning water charging decisions across Europe. We will know who uses, who pollutes, what it costs and who pays for it! Everyone will be encouraged to get involved in discussions to ensure that charges are devised appropriately integrating economic, environmental and social principles.



## Joint **implementation**

The way the Water Framework Directive will be implemented is unique. It relies on the participation of all the players concerned. It also provides the European Commission, the Member States, the Candidate Countries and all stakeholders with an unprecedented chance for a new partnership to guide the process and ensure effective and coherent implementation.

The Directive's provisions are complex and far-reaching, and it has been widely recognised that implementation will be greatly assisted by the preparation of guidelines on a range of technical issues. This challenge has been taken up in the framework of the Common Implementation Strategy for the WFD developed jointly by the Member States and the European Commission and agreed in May 2001.

### *Important deadlines of the Directive:*

- **December 2003**  
National and regional water laws to be adapted to the WFD.  
River Basin co-operation to be made operational.
- **December 2004**  
An analysis of pressures and impacts on our waters has to be completed including an economic analysis.
- **December 2006**  
Monitoring programmes have to be operational as a basis for the water management.
- **December 2008**  
River Basin Management plans presented to the public.
- **December 2009**  
Publishing first River Basin Management Plans.
- **December 2015**  
Waters to meet "good status".

European Commission

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A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

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