

WISE Newsletter

The bulletin of the Water Information System for Europe

Issue n°4 - December 2006



FOREWORD

The year 2006 provided intense and fruitful developments in the water and marine policy sectors. Many policy developments which were announced in the 3rd edition of the WISE Newsletter resulted in positive outcomes. This fourth issue summarises the main achievements of the second semester of 2006, including the policies negotiated under the Finnish Presidency.

To start, I would like to say how happy I am at the outcome of the informal meeting of EU Water Directors, which has been held in Inari (Lapland) on 31 November and 1st December 2006. In addition to endorsing several guidance documents supporting the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Directors also agreed on the work programme for the fourth phase of the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) of the WFD (2007-2009). This will ensure continued exchanges between experts, water managers and decision-makers in Member States and the European institutions.

The key milestones of this second semester may be summarised as follows:

- Marine Strategy Directive - Following the European Parliament's first reading, the Council reached a political agreement on a Common Position on 18 December 2006;
- Groundwater Directive - An agreement was reached in conciliation and formally adopted in third reading on 12 December 2006;
- Flood Directive - The Council published its Common Position and the Commission expects the second reading to begin in early 2007;
- Priority Substances Directive - The first reading is expected to be adopted in the spring of 2007.

There are also developments on the policy implementation side, which are of course intimately linked to mandatory policy requirements, but also to constructive exchanges between implementation working groups as summarised in this newsletter.

Our efforts to ensure high levels of protection for the water and marine environments will only be successful if the European Commission, Member States and stakeholders work closely together. The road ahead is long. There are many challenges to be tackled, e.g. water scarcity and drought, adaptation to climate change, etc. In this respect, 2007 augurs as a labour-intensive year, and I very much look forward to keeping our target on track.

In conclusion, I would like to remind everyone of the European Conference that will take place on 22-23 March 2007 in Brussels. This event will mark the official launch of the Water Information System for Europe (WISE). Registration is open on-line from 11 January.

All colleagues from the Water and Marine Unit are happy to join me in wishing you and your families a healthy, happy and successful new year.

Peter GAMMELTOFT

Head of the Water & Marine unit at DG ENV



The WISE Newsletter is the information bulletin of the Water & Marine unit of the Environment General-Directorate of the European Commission.

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The Water & Marine unit would like to say a warm goodbye to Christof Planitzer and Gilles Crosnier. During the last four years Christof efficiently managed discussions on policy infringements. Since 2004, Gilles was very active on Water Framework Directive (WFD) and links with agriculture and general integration issues. We wish them much success in their careers.

The unit is happy to welcome back Ingrid Pesce, who after a short stay at DG Education and Culture, missed the WFD Team so much that she decided to come back. We would also like to welcome Marieke Van Nood who has joined the WFD Team. And finally, a welcome to Thierry Rende who is now in charge of following-up the Bathing Water Directive.

Sadly, we bid our last farewell to our colleague Françoise Van Assche who, after a long and brave battle against her illness, passed away in October.

Legal notice

Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on its behalf is responsible for the use that might be made of the information contained in this publication.

Water Framework Directive

State of implementation

An updated scoreboard on the legal transposition and implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is available under:

<http://ec.europa.eu/comm/environment/water/water-framework/scoreboard.html>

The Commission is currently drafting the WFD implementation report according to Article 18(3) of the Directive, which is due for publication on 22 March 2007.

The early results on key issues and performance show some achievements but also highlight gaps in the current implementation. The Commission intends to present some recommendations to Member States for improvements until 2009, supporting them in the finalisation of the river basin management plans. Recognising that this is an important milestone for judging the success of implementation, the Commission is committed to closely working with Member States on this issue.

Common Implementation Strategy

Meeting of Water Directors of the European Union, Candidate and EFTA Countries

The Water Directors of the European Union¹ (EU), Candidate Countries² and EFTA Countries³ met on 30 November and 1 December 2006 in Inari (Finland) to discuss, in particular:

- the progress of the Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive;
- the future Work Programme for the Common Implementation Strategy for the years 2007-2009;
- the developments on reporting and the Water Information System for Europe (WISE);
- the integration of water policy in other policy areas, in particular agriculture policy and hydromorphology;
- the aspects of water scarcity and climate change in relation to water policy.

In addition, the Water Directors were informed of the progress made in a number of areas, namely:

¹ Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, the European Commission and the European Environment Agency.

² Bulgaria and Croatia. Absent: Romania, Turkey and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

³ Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Absent: Liechtenstein

- the EU Marine Strategy;
- the EU Flood Action Programme;
- the reporting aspects regarding other water directives, in particular the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive;
- the new Daughter Directive on groundwater protection and the proposal for a Directive on priority substances; and
- the progress on the EU Water Initiative, in particular the components for the ECCAA and MED regions.

Intercalibration process

The intercalibration exercise is developing as planned. The publication of the results is envisaged in three parts: the results of the exercise, guidelines for application and interpretation of the results and a technical report. Detailed information will be communicated in the next issue of the WISE Newsletter.

Environmental objectives / exemptions

A document on the application of Article 4.7 was presented in its final form by the Commission. This document deals specifically with assessing the impact of new projects to ensure that they are compatible with the WFD. The document was endorsed by the Water Directors. The Commission requested everyone to be vigilant in the application of this article since there is an increasing number of projects brought to the attention of the Commission which do not correctly apply this provision.

WFD and Agriculture

A declaration was adopted by the Water Directors (excepted DK) as well as a synthesis report of the activity. The intention is to put forward the declaration to the Member States Ministries. For its part, DG Environment will forward it to DG Agriculture. The Commission stressed the importance of cross-compliance for the long-term. In particular, practical (feasible and controlled) measures will have to be designed.

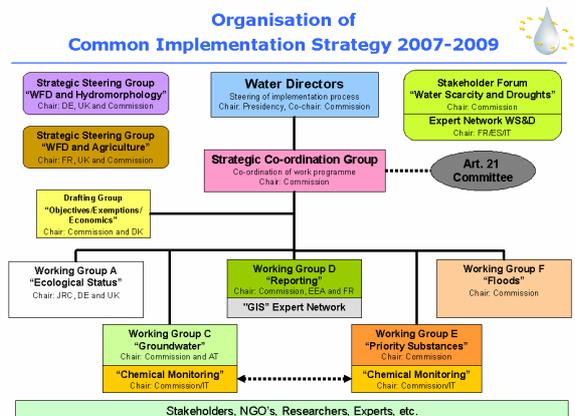
The synthesis report was also endorsed by the Water Directors and a report on pressures and impacts was presented for information.

The Water Directors were informed that Sweden will invite to agriculture and environment Ministers from countries around the Baltic Sea to a Ministerial meeting. The meeting will take place in Sweden on 19-20 April 2007.

Future activities under the CIS Work

The Water Directors endorsed the future Work Programme for the Common Implementation Strategy, albeit with some amendments which concern, in particular, the mandate on water scarcity and droughts (aiming to complement the

Stakeholder Forum established by the Commission). The main activities for the period 2007-2009 are depicted in the diagram below. The final CIS work programme will be made publicly available in January.



Reporting and WISE

Overview of recent developments

The progress and next steps on compliance reporting Water Information System for Europe (WISE) was presented to the Water Directors. The CIS Working Group D (Reporting) is actively preparing the 2010 RBMP Reporting Guidance which will be presented to the next meeting of the Water Directors for endorsement.

Regarding WISE, the Article 3 and 5 reports are progressing and the Commission has thanked the Member States for their contribution and support. Those Member States which did not submit or re-submit their reports electronically to WISE are still welcome to do so. The tools for the electronic submission of Article 8 Reports will become available in January 2007 and were presented at the WISE workshop which was held on 9/10 January.

Finally, the proposal to prepare a new WISE GIS guidance was presented. It will become part of the new work programme.

SoE reporting and WISE public launch

The European Environment Agency (EEA) presented the current prototype for the WISE public viewer which will be launched on 22 March 2007. The EEA also informed the Water Directors on the current discussion on the preparation of the State-of-Environment (SoE) Reporting guidance document.

WISE-RTD presentation

The Netherlands has raised the issue of greater cooperation between water policy-makers and the research community. Continued efforts should be made to fully exploit synergies

On behalf of the HarmoniCA project, the Commission presented the prototype of the WISE-RTD web portal which will be a gateway allowing users to get access to information on water-related projects with relevance to the WFD. The Water Directors were invited to send comments to the developers. The WISE-RTD portal will be launched together with WISE on 22 March 2007.

State of progress of Priority Substances Directive

In July 2006 the Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy⁴ (which would become a 'daughter' Directive of the Water Framework Directive). It also adopted a Communication on integrated prevention and control of chemical pollution of surface waters in the EU⁵ and a related Impact Assessment⁶ working document. The directive proposal sets environmental quality standards for 41 types of pesticides, heavy metals and other dangerous chemical substances that have been identified as posing a particular risk to animal and plant life in the aquatic environment and to human health. The proposal is part of the Commission's initiative to simplify legislation in the European Union (the Better Regulation initiative). The proposed directive will replace/repeal five current directives (listed in Annex IX of the Water Framework Directive) which deal with water chemical pollution. More information on the content of the proposal can be found on the Commission's website or in the June 2006 edition of the WISE newsletter.

Co-decision negotiations on the proposal are currently taking place within the Council and Parliament. The Environment Working Party of the Council discussed the proposal in October. The Finnish Presidency presented a progress report to the Environment Council in December highlighting the key issues that were brought up during the discussions. The Parliament Environment Committee is due to vote on the proposal in February 2007. The first reading by the full European Parliament is expected in the spring of 2007. The German Presidency aims to have political agreement in Council by June 2007.

⁴ COM (2006) 397 final

⁵ COM (2006) 398 final

⁶ SEC (2006) 947

The Water Directors agreed in December 2006 to convert the Expert Advisory Forum - which provided support in the development of the priority substances proposal – into Working Group E on Priority Substances. It would then become part of the Common Implementation Strategy of the Water Framework Directive. The working group mandate would cover several areas, including the development of a prioritisation methodology for reviewing the present priority substances list; a data collection and processing exercise; further developing the methodology for setting environmental quality standards for priority substances; chemical monitoring; and drawing-up guidance documents on WFD implementation in relation to dangerous substances and on additional elements which may be required following approval of the priority substances proposal by Council and Parliament.

Groundwater Directive

Adoption of the new Groundwater Directive

Following the agreement reached by the European Parliament and the Council at the 17 October Conciliation meeting, the new Groundwater Directive (as per Article 17 of the WFD) was adopted by the European Parliament on the 12 December (Directive 2006/118/EC). This directive will ensure a high level of protection from pollution and deterioration based on a common European approach. It will leave a considerable degree of flexibility to the Member States on achieving the WFD environmental objectives. Member States will be required to monitor and assess groundwater quality on the basis of common criteria and to identify and reverse trends in groundwater pollution.

The Directive is based on a mixed regime. On the one hand, it establishes quality standards that must be met and, on the other hand, it introduces measures to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants into groundwater. Member States will have to establish some of the standards (threshold values) themselves at the most appropriate level, taking into account local or regional conditions. In addition to the Water Framework Directive, the groundwater directive is closely linked to the Nitrates Directive, the Landfill Directive and the future Soil Framework Directive. Together, these directives make up a framework which paves the way for improved evaluation of groundwater environmental quality in Europe.

Detailed information on the directive and related implementation activities (in particular the CIS Working Group C) and research-related activities are available at the following address: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/index_en.htm

Groundwater Monitoring Guidance

The Working Group C on Groundwater (WG C) of the WFD Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) drew up a guidance document on groundwater monitoring. The document is now publicly available as an Internet publication (CIS Guidance N°15) on the *europa* water site. The guidance document is one of the outputs of the WG C mandate for the period 2005-2006. The drafting stage involved 28 experts from 12 Member and Associate States, 6 stakeholder organisations and the European Commission. The drafts were discussed and approved by the 80 members of the working group. The guidance document was drawn up at the request of Member States that wanted to complement the CIS Guidance N°7 on monitoring under the WFD. The drafting is based on a technical workshop held in 2005, which was followed-up by a series of expert meetings. It focuses primarily on requirements of Article 8 and Annex V of the WFD, and covers both chemical and quantitative status monitoring issues.

The guidance document is composed of 8 main parts, which cover (1) general principles on conceptual modelling, aquifer typologies, grouping of groundwater bodies, integrated monitoring; (2) chemical status and trend monitoring, in particular design of surveillance and operational programmes, site and parameter selection, frequency; (3) quantity monitoring; (4) specific protected area monitoring; (5) monitoring linked to prevent or limit measures; (6) monitoring data quality; (7) recommendations on methods for sampling and analysis; and finally (8) reporting. Annexes provide additional elements on aquifer types, requirements for monitoring points, selection of determinands etc. Eight case studies from different countries complement this guidance document, illustrating various groundwater typologies. The document was endorsed by the EU Water Directors at their meeting in Inari (Finland) on 30 November-1 December 2006.

Workshop Reports

Monitoring networks

The summary of the two-day workshop held in Brussels on 27-28 April on Monitoring Networks and Classification Systems is available on CIRCA at the following address:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/env/wfd/library?l=/framework_directive/thematic_documents/12_-_monitoring/monitoring_networks

Cost-benefit study workshop

A workshop was held on 20 November 2006 where a cost-benefit study of the Water Framework Directive - carried out by consultants for DG Environment – was analysed. The workshop was attended by Member State and

stakeholder representatives. The aim of the meeting was to present progress made in the run up to the final report, focusing specifically on cost-benefit case studies in agriculture (water use and phosphate releases), wetlands and fish migration measures and administrative costs. The data gathered from questionnaires submitted by Member States was also presented. Member States were encouraged to contribute more information. A second workshop will be held in April 2007 to discuss the final draft report. This report will be important to assess the state of available information on costs and benefits of the WFD and show the way forward. The final report is expected for mid-2007.

Water Policies Implementation

Bathing Water Directive

A Committee Meeting on the new Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC) took place on 17 October 2006. Convened at the Commission's request, the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss and reach agreement on a future work programme on a number of issues previously raised by Member States. Member State representatives showed a very pro-active approach and appreciated the Commission's initiative. The Committee agreed to:

- Establish a working group on developing a system of signs and symbols indicating the bathing water classification and prohibition or advice against bathing.
- Develop reporting sheets for the future reporting system (integration of bathing water reporting into WISE).
- Hold a workshop for exchange of information and experience on bathing water profiles, to take place before the summer break 2007.

Currently a number of Member States have expressed an interest in participating and/or leading the aforementioned working groups.

The deadline for transposition the directive 2006/7/EC is 24 March 2008. However, it is expected that some Member States will start monitoring the indicators set out in the new directive already from the bathing season 2007, which is possible according to article 3.5. This year all Member States will report the parameters under the "old" Directive. The 2007 Bathing Water Report (bathing season 2006) will thus not change as regards monitored parameters.

The Commission has launched infringement cases against eleven old Member States for not reporting on previously listed sites. These cover some 7000 bathing water areas dating as far back as the 1990s. Most of these Member States have already sent information which will be analysed in detail by the Commission during the coming months. The Commission also intends to tackle the non-recognition of bathing sites. This is an issue of concern in several EU Member States because these sites are neither monitored nor reported, but nevertheless used by bathers.

Finally, the Commission is following up on trends in bathing water quality. It proposed measures to improve the bathing water quality of 6 new Member States whose results were not satisfactory over the past one to two bathing seasons. Action will be taken if necessary.

Urban Waste Water Directive

At the Water Directors meeting in Finland, the Commission presented an overview of the recent progress in the implementation of the Directive on Urban Waste Water Treatment (UWWTD). The Commission highlighted the positive developments of the work carried out by the working group on reporting UWWTD-REP, which was re-launched following the agreement at last Water Directors meeting.

The meeting of the UWWTD-REP took place on 18 October 2006 where it was agreed to proceed with:

- A systems approach of reporting to ensure closer links with the WFD Common implementation strategy and the WISE process, and to ensure synergies with wastewater-related reporting exercises of other EU bodies (EEA, Eurostat);
- A revised approach based on the thematic blocks of reporting indicators;
- A two-step approach to finalise the questionnaire and IT-tool for urban wastewater reporting (leaving more sensitive and new issues to the second stage).

The Commission is confident that outstanding issues of the first phase of the 2007 questionnaire (which is mostly based on the data requested during previous reporting exercises) and the draft explanatory paper on 'Terms and definitions of UWWTD' supporting reporting process can be resolved in the next meeting of the UWWTD-REP working group.

The UWWTD work programme for 2007-2008 is as follows:

- Distinguishing between formal work and decisions under article 18 UWWTD, and informal cooperation and exchange of information work based on consensus (similar to the Common Implementation Strategy under the WFD);
- Creating a closer link to and integrating urban wastewater reporting into WISE (CIS working group D);
- Finalising a coherent reporting system on urban wastewater to ensure synergies on urban wastewater reporting with other EU institutions and international organisations;
- Presenting results of reported information in the WISE Viewer for 22 March 2007
- Enforcing the implementation of the Directive at EU level.

Other Water & Marine Policy developments

Marine Strategy Directive

The European Parliament concluded its first reading of the Marine Strategy Directive on 14 November 2006:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sidesSearch/sipadeMapUrl.do?PROG=TA&L=EN&REF_P=P6_TA-2006-0482.

The Environment Council reached a political agreement under the Finnish Presidency at the Environment Council on 18 December 2006. The Commission is hopeful that the momentum will be maintained and that the directive will soon be adopted. Commissioner Dimas welcomed the political agreement reached by Council on the framework directive for an EU marine environment policy. The Council's position takes onboard several of the points raised by the European Parliament (the importance of co-operation and coordination between Member States and non-EU countries, the ecosystem approach, etc.). However, the Commission regrets that the Council's position is not as ambitious as the Commission's initial proposal, especially as regards the binding nature of the "good environmental status" objective. Commissioner Dimas said: "Today's political agreement is a major step towards a better protection of our oceans and seas through the adoption of the Marine Strategy Directive. While I regret that the Council has not been more ambitious, I am pleased that the Council fully recognises the strong need for a European integrated approach

to protect our oceans and seas more effectively. Swift adoption of the Marine Strategy Directive is a priority if we are to ensure that European citizens benefit from seas and oceans that are safe, clean, healthy and rich in nature. This is also a pre-condition for the maritime economy to thrive".

The Strategy combines a European with a regional approach. It balances the need for common approaches across Europe on similar issues with the need to devote more attention to regional issues based on Member States' experiences in the regional seas conventions.

Preparations for the implementation of the Marine Strategy in the field of monitoring and assessment are being informally tackled in the European Marine Monitoring and Assessment (EMMA) working group. For its part, the European Environment Agency (EEA) organised two thematic workshops on the role of operational oceanography and biological and ecological elements:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/env/marine/library?l=/workingsgroups/europeansmarinesmonitori/eea-led_2006-2007&vm=detailed&sb=Title

The Agency will also host a third workshop in April 2007 on marine chemical loads and burdens.

A further stakeholder meeting was held on 29 November 2006 to update interested international organisations on current developments and to foster an open discussion on the elements that will be crucial to successfully implement the future directive, such as the concept of 'good environmental status':

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/env/marine/library?l=/stakeholdersmeetings/stakeholder_meetings&vm=detailed&sb=Title

With respect to the role of the Marine Strategy as the environmental pillar of the future maritime policy, an extensive stakeholder consultation is taking place until 30 June 2007:

http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy_en.html

The Commission intends to reach a wide range of stakeholders. The Commission hopes that the Green Paper will spark a broad public debate on the European Union's overall approach to maritime policy and bring forth ideas for measures required to put the policy into action. The Commission wishes to base its work in this area on the views of stakeholders.

Flood Risk Management

The Council's Common position on the directive relating to the assessment and management of floods was finalised late in 2006. The Commission's Communication was adopted on 6.12.2006. At the time of this newsletter's publication the timetable for the second reading was not known.

The Water Directors meeting, at their meeting on 30 November-1 December 2006, adopted a mandate for a new Floods Working Group, which now will replace the Floods stakeholder forum. Dates for the 2007 meetings will be presented once the timetable for the second reading of the Directive is known.

In the framework of the European Flood Action Programme, work is continuing in the two exchange networks on flood forecasting (on how to communicate risks to the public) and flood mapping (guide on current practices in the Member States), where two key documents are close to being finalised and are expected to be published in the first half of 2007. A workshop will be held in Oslo (Norway) from 31 January to 2 February 2007 on land use management and integrated water management, with a special focus on flood risk protection. The aim is to develop a possible exchange network on this topic, depending on the views expressed at the workshop.

Water scarcity & drought

Concerns about droughts and water scarcity have come about in Member States due to an increasing frequency of droughts in recent years. This led in 2003 to the very first technical work to be carried out in this area within the framework of the CIS.

At the request of a number of Member states, the Commission presented a study on water scarcity and droughts at the Environment Council in June 2006.

Recognising the severity of the challenge brought about by water scarcity and droughts in Europe, the Commission is conducting an in-depth assessment of the situation in the European Union. A first Interim report of this in-depth assessment was discussed by the Water Directors in December in Inari, Finland.

The Information Note and the Interim Report are available at:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/env/wfd/library?l=/framework_directive/scarcity_droughts

In light of preliminary results and of the overall policy context, the Commission is planning to present a Communication on these issues in 2007.

This process requires the active involvement of all interested parties. To this end, the Commission intends to launch a forum for stakeholders so that they may contribute to the debate. The forum is expected to be an integral part of the process.

The Expert Network on Water Scarcity & Drought, which was set up within the framework of the CIS, is helping the Commission in preparing the assessment and the analysis of issues linked to the implementation of the WFD.

In the spring of 2007 work will continue on water scarcity and drought as part of the preparatory work for the Communication. In early September 2007, the EU Portuguese Presidency will include this issue on the agenda of the informal Environment ministerial meeting.

International activities

EU Water Initiative (EUWI)

The Multi-stakeholder forum of the EUWI held its annual meeting in August in Stockholm during the World Water week. It provided a framework for discussion and consultation with a broad group of water-sector and development co-operation interests. The discussions confirmed the relevance of the EUWI and identified where improvements were needed. The role of local government as a key stakeholder for the delivery of services was emphasised, as was the role of research in demonstrating ways to sustainable water resources management and contributing to a knowledge-based capacity building. The first EUWI annual report, based on 2005 data, was presented.

General information and latest developments of the EUWI are available at: www.euwi.net

Conference of the Water Directors of the Euro-Mediterranean and South-Eastern European countries

The conference held on 6-7 November in Athens, Greece, served as a forum to contribute to the implementation of the MED EUWI and review the progress of the main initiatives related to the water sector. The Water Directors recognised the need for better coordination of all processes related to water in the region, particularly within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). They also called for the organisation of a special Euro-Mediterranean and South-eastern European countries' Ministerial

Conference on Water, almost 10 years after the Turin Conference. At this Conference, Ministers in charge of water would address the major policy issues related to water resources management, protection and services, and consider the work and progress achieved. They should also propose priority measures to be implemented.

The second phase of the 2007-2009 MED-EUWI/WFD Joint Process was approved. Thematic work at regional level will be further developed and the work of the three existing thematic working groups will be continued (water scarcity & drought; groundwater management; linking rural development with water management). And three new ones will be set up (waste water reuse; shared water resources management; water monitoring). In addition, thematic recommendations produced at regional level will be assessed by the network of Mediterranean Pilot Basins.

The conclusions of the Water Directors conference were presented at the Third Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Environment, held in Cairo, Egypt, on 20 November 2006. Information is available at:

<http://www.minenv.gr/medeuwi/>
<http://www.emwis.net/documents/meetings/fo1148169/fo1106940>

Other related policies

Progress of the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection

On 22 September 2006, the Commission adopted a comprehensive strategy to ensure that Europe's soils remain healthy and capable of supporting human activities and ecosystems. The strategy sets a common EU framework for action to preserve, protect and restore soil, but leaves Member States some flexibility to implement it in a way which best fits the local context. Member States must tackle threats such as landslides, contamination, soil erosion, the loss of soil organic matter, compaction, salinisation and sealing wherever they occur, or threaten to occur, on their national territories. The proposal for a Soil Framework Directive will require Member States to draw up an inventory of contaminated sites within 25 years of it coming into force.

Contamination is defined as the presence of dangerous substances in such levels that present a significant risk to human health or the environment, account being taken of the soil use. More information at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm>.

Climate changes & water policy

Science-policy workshop on Climate Change Impacts on the Water Cycle, Brussels (25-26 September 2006)

Climate change, its impacts and links with natural hazards is becoming one of the key international problems of the 21st century. There is increasing evidence that human induced climate change has already started with potential negative impacts on society with a variety of consequences for air quality, water cycle, human and ecosystem, productivity and stratospheric ozone. Research from recent decades has been instrumental in clarifying and quantifying climate mechanisms and strengthening political and regulatory measures. International research assessments have provided the basis for global initiatives – such as the Kyoto and Montreal Protocols – as a means to protect the climate and our planet.

Within the Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7), research on the environment, and especially climate change, will involve:

- analysing climate change, pollution and risks,
 - Pressures on environment and climate,
 - Environment and health
 - Natural hazards (such as volcanoes, droughts and floods, earthquakes, storms, etc)
- the sustainable management of resources,
- environmental technologies, and
- Earth observation and assessment tools.

The above environmental research conducted at EU level will help to implement the Union's international commitments. It will also contribute to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and serve to fulfil the research needs of existing and upcoming EU policies such as the EU's Second Climate Change Programme, WFD, Sixth Environmental Action Plan, etc.

Within such a context, scientists, water managers and policy-makers gathered in Brussels on 25-26 September 2006 to discuss the impact of climate change on water. They also analysed the results of EU-funded research projects conducted in this area. The discussions yielded plenty of interesting ideas for experts drawing up new environmental legislation.

The need to hold such a workshop stems from the recommendations made by the Water Directors at their December 2005 meeting in London where they expressed the need for greater scientific background knowledge, especially when drawing up policies.

The workshop represented a milestone in defining key elements on the assessment of climate change impact on the water cycle, quality and resources and on creating the link between science and policy. The event provided a unique opportunity for experts to assess whether there is sufficient sound scientific evidence on which to base new policies. Specialist workshops focused not only on the environmental challenges that scientists and policy-makers face, but also on the socio-economic repercussions that rising temperatures will inevitably have.

Conference delegates discussed the outcome of recent research on climate change and water, and outlined new priorities for more research funded under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

Crucial issues discussed during the workshop were:

- the impact of Climate Change on future fresh water availability,
- the need to investigate the impact of climate change on specific regions,
- future changes in climate, society and economy will increase flood risks in large parts of Europe,
- that developing countries are very vulnerable to climate change due to the tropical climate and their strong dependence on environmental conditions.
- Interdisciplinary research is needed to offer knowledge and strategies for a sustainable development in a changing climate. It also needed to provide results to be taken aboard in the policy development.
- the link between research results and policy making but also between water and climate policies has been posed and discussed during the Workshop.
- In addition, climate Change should be part of the proposed directive on flood risk management.
- that climate change has an impact on water balance and drought however are not emphasised enough in water policy (the Water Framework Directive, WFD) despite the fact that the WFD - through the River Basin Management Plans - establishes a framework for possible adaptive measures linked to climate change.

The workshop underlined the need to create a permanent platform to exchange information among scientists and policy-makers. Finally, it demonstrated that the interaction between science and policy is essential to tackle such a challenging issue.

The event was also an intermediate step in organising an International Conference on Climate Change and the European Water Dimension which will be held under the auspices of the German Presidency in Berlin on 12-14 February 2007 (see separate article).

A European Commission publication gathering abstracts on the presentations from all speakers will be issued and presented at the Symposium in Berlin.

Conference on Climate Change and the European Water Dimension, Berlin (12-14 February 2007)

At the behest of the German presidency of the EU, the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the European Commission's DG Environment will organise in Berlin on 12 to 14 February 2007 an international conference with the following title: **"Time to Adapt - Climate Change and the European Water Dimension"**.

The aim of the conference is to provide a platform for representatives from governments, science and research, stakeholder groups and non-governmental organisations. They will discuss the likely impacts of climate change on water management and water dependent sectors such as agriculture, energy, inland navigation and tourism, as well as options for adaptation, and to strengthen the political profile of these issues.

Further information is available at the conference website:

<http://www.climate-water-adaptation-berlin2007.org>

Science-policy integration

Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development

Research within the European Commission

The Treaty establishing the European Union indicates that Research Framework Programmes have to serve two main strategic objectives. First, it provides a scientific and technological basis for industry and encourages its international competitiveness. And second, it promotes research activities in support of other EU policies. To this end, Framework Programmes are designed to help solving problems and responding to major socio-economic challenges faced by society. The Research Framework Programme (FP) is the European Union's main instrument for funding research and development. The Sixth FP is now about to be terminated, and will be continued by the Seventh FP which began on 1 January 2007 and will run until the end of 2013.

The FP6 was the Commission's response to the requirements of the Lisbon Summit in March 2000. The summit called for a better use of European research by creating an internal market for science and technology (the European Research area). The seventh Research Framework Programme is designed to build on the achievements of its predecessor and move forward in the creation of a European knowledge economy and society. FP7 is to respond to Europe's employment needs, competitiveness and quality of life.

Within the Seventh Framework Programme (formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on the 18 December 2006), the Environment (including climate change) theme has a budget of 1890 millions euros for the period 2007-2013 (on a total budget of 50 521 millions euros). It should also be noted that the Commission has published calls for proposals addressed to individuals to establish expert databases. Registration can be done online under: http://cordis.europa.eu/research_openings/home.html.

An example of successful research in support of water policy implementation- BRIDGE

The BRIDGE project (standing for "Background Criteria for the Identification of Groundwater Thresholds") was designed to develop a common methodology intended to be used by Member States for establishing groundwater threshold values. The project has been developed in 2004-2006 and recently came to a close (final meeting held in Paris on 15 December 2006). It was carried out at European level and involved a range of stakeholders, including the scientific and

policy-making communities. The different objectives were:

- To evaluate and gather scientific results to set criteria for the assessment of the chemical status of groundwater. These criteria will be translated into data used for the characterisation of natural and anthropogenic pollutants, parameters indicative for pollution, and data used for the hydrologic and hydrogeological characterisation of groundwater bodies;
- To draw up criteria for setting scientifically sound groundwater threshold values for national river basin districts or groundwater bodies;
- To check the suitability and validity of the approach through European-wide case studies which would assess its environmental, economic and social impact.

The methodology that transpired from this process was drawn up in consultation with representatives from Member State's environment ministries and agencies, and from stakeholders of the CIS Working Group on Groundwater (WG C). It took into account the negotiations of the new Groundwater Directive which was taking place at the time. This presented an additional challenge above and beyond the scientific one.

The final meeting has been held in Paris on 15 December 2006. The proposed method for deriving groundwater threshold values will now be directly communicated to Member States experts for policy discussions. The proposal is expected to be adopted before the summer of 2007. The research will therefore have fulfilled one of the requirements of the new Groundwater Directive, namely by supporting the obligation of Member States to establish groundwater threshold values by the end of 2008 according to a common methodological approach.

WISE-RTD development

The development of the WISE-RTD webportal is in full swing. As described in the last issue of the WISE Newsletter, the aim of this portal is to provide access to scientific information in order to support implementation of water policies. It will be part of the official launch of WISE planned for the end of March 2007.

The WISE-RTD portal will provide intelligent search functions on tools and experiences from RTD projects. It will also include guidance documents to support the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The search function will be based on WFD-specific issues (e.g. WFD milestones, WFD-terminology) and issues covered by other water policies, and will cater to various users such as policy-makers, water managers, stakeholders, model specialists etc.

The system is currently at a prototype stage and will be continually developed over the next few years. It will be tested by end-users and will be regularly updated with information from international and national scientific projects and initiatives. Such updating will be facilitated thanks to a new project designed to provide scientific support to water policies (SPI-Water) whose task is to analyse current and past RTD and LIFE projects and their actual impacts on water policies. Representatives of river basin networks (e.g; Pilot River Basin Network and International Basin Organisation) will be able to validate the information in the WISE-RTD portal. More detail about this project will be provided in the next WISE Newsletter.

Forthcoming conferences in 2007

Three major international conferences involving the DG Environment Water & Marine unit are planned during the first quarter of 2007, namely on Climate Change (February), Status Monitoring (March, see www.WFDLille2007.org) and WISE (March, see information below).

Forthcoming meetings (first half of 2007)⁷

- ✓ Water scarcity & Drought Stakeholder Forum, Brussels, 29/01/07
- ✓ Water scarcity & drought Expert Network, Brussels, 04/2007
- ✓ Chemical Monitoring Activity expert group, Berlin, 2/05/07
- ✓ Working Group Groundwater (WG C), Berlin, 3/05/07
- ✓ Workshop on Drought Management Plan, Madrid, 06/2007
- ✓ CIS Strategic Coordination Group, Brussels, 5/10/06 and 8-9/11/06
- ✓ Water Directors meeting, 06/2007, Dresden, Germany

Conferences in 2007

- ✓ Int. Symposium on Climate Change Impacts and the Water Dimension, Berlin, 12-14/02/07
- ✓ Int. Conference on Water Status Monitoring under the WFD, Lille, 12-14/03/07
- ✓ European Water Conference – WISE Public Launch, Brussels, 22-23/03/07

Two major events in March 2007

Water Status Monitoring under the WFD

This conference will review chemical and ecological status monitoring features of aquatic ecosystems in the context of the WFD, gathering representatives of policy and scientific communities. It will be held in Lille on 12-14 March 2007

Registration is opened under www.WFDLille2007.org

European Water Conference

The European Water Conference and launch of the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) will take place in Brussels on 22-23 March 2007.

The registration will be opened on-line from 11 January onward under <http://ec.europa.eu/comm/environment/water> or <http://registry.eurokeys.com/>



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⁷ Most of these meetings are based on invitations, i.e. they are not opened to external participations (except the conference marked in red in the table)