



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Lord Boswell,

The European Commission would like to thank the House of Lords for its report on EU Freshwater Policy. In line with the Commission's decision to encourage national Parliaments to play an active role to improve the process of policy formulation, we welcome this opportunity to respond to your comments.

The Commission shares the assessment that no changes are to be expected to the Water Framework Directive in the short term as it would be too soon to amend this instrument in the middle of its first implementation cycle. The Commission assessment of the Member States' river basins management plans will be published in November 2012, together with the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources. This will give us a clear picture of where Member States stand in relation to the achievement of the objective of good water status by 2015.

The Commission is conscious of the fact that the principle of 'one out all out' in the assessment of water status under the Water Framework Directive may hide progress made in water quality status since good status is not achieved when a single parameter is not fulfilled. This is why in the Proposal on Priority Substances, the Commission introduced the possibility for Member States to present different maps of water status which show more precisely on which parameters progress has been achieved. The Commission will continue to promote transparency and better communication on this issue in the context of the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) under the Water Framework Directive.

In relation to the above mentioned Proposal on Priority Substances, the Commission would like to recall that the pharmaceutical substances proposed for listing have been selected on the basis of a thorough scientific and technical process, involving relevant stakeholders such as the pharmaceutical industry, that has provided solid evidence of the risks that these substances pose via or to the aquatic environment. The Commission favours and encourages prevention measures to reduce water contamination by these pollutants as they are more cost effective than end of pipe solutions.

*Lord BOSWELL
Chairman of the European Union
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The Commission agrees with the House of Lords that the Common Implementation Strategy under the Water Framework Directive is an essential tool for the dissemination of best practices and to improve implementation. This forum is already accessible to stakeholders that wish to join it and in fact a very wide range of interests are represented. We intend to preserve this open approach and we have also recently decided to disclose to the general public all documents developed under the CIS.

With regard to the future challenges for EU water policy, the Commission agrees on the strong inter-linkages between quantitative and qualitative aspects of water management and on the important role to be played by water pricing and metering as instruments of water policy. The future policy developments will continue to take a holistic approach to water management thereby addressing also urban pollution as suggested by the House of Lords, in particular in relation to issues such as green infrastructures and sustainable urban drainage.

Concerning governance aspects, the Commission would like to point out that the Water Framework Directive provides for the possibility to develop programmes and plans at sub-basin level as a flexible means for Member States to engage stakeholders at local level. The Commission encourages stakeholders' involvement at all levels. In relation to financing, it is indeed exploring in the context of the Blueprint also possibilities for funding from the European Investment Bank in addition to rural and regional development funding.

In relation to the integration of water concerns into agricultural policy, we welcome the House of Lords' support for the addition of the Water Framework Directive to cross-compliance, for farm advice and for Pillar 2 water related measures as proposed by the Commission. The Commission believes that – should these proposals be retained by the co-legislators – their implementation would not need to be delayed considering the advanced stage of implementation of the Directive in the Member States.

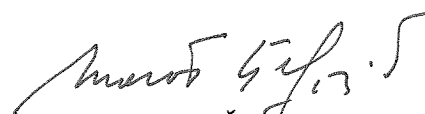
Regarding the Impact Assessment of new legislation by the Commission, this already includes environmental, economic and social impacts: implications for water management must be considered in that context as recommended by the House of Lords.

The Commission, in the context of the Blueprint, is also looking at payments for the provision of ecosystem services and at ways to promote their development and take up, including by improving methods for ecosystem service assessment.

In connection to innovation and research, the Commission welcomes the House of Lords' support for the European Innovation Partnership on Water and sees this initiative as an important tool for dissemination of innovative solutions to water challenges at all levels. The Commission is also studying, in the preparation of the Blueprint, the potential of awareness raising tools such as the 'water footprint'.

I hope the above comments address the points raised in your Opinion and I am looking forward to continuing our constructive political dialogue in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maroš Šefčovič', written in a cursive style.

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*