

Water in the European Union

Why does it need protection?

The importance of water for life and as a component of the global ecosystem is becoming increasingly clear. It is a resource that not only provides basic needs for the human population and is the key to development in particular to generate and sustain wealth through agriculture, commercial fishing, power generation, industry, transport and tourism, but water is vital for all global ecosystems. However, the facts show that we face a global water crisis.

At first glance, this does not appear to apply to Europe's water. After all, the continent faces no overall water shortages. However, Europe's water quality and Europe's water management is, in fact, far from satisfactory.

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.**

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 address the problems effectively and help secure these resources for future generations.

The Water Framework Directive expands the scope of water protection to all waters and sets a clear objectives that "good status" must be achieved for all European waters by 2015 and that sustainable water use is ensured throughout Europe.



European Commission

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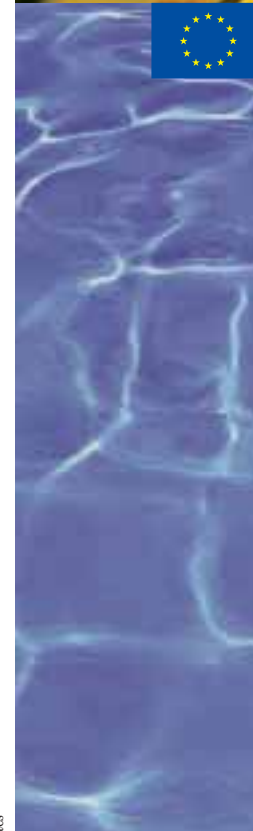
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Water is life

Water Framework Directive

European Commission



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Water is life

Water Framework Directive

European Commission

A new, innovative approach The Framework Directive

- Protects all waters - rivers, lakes, coastal waters, and groundwaters.
- Sets ambitious objectives to ensure that all waters meet "good status" by 2015.
- Sets up a system of management within river basins that recognises that water systems do not stop at political borders.
- Requires cross border co-operation between countries and all involved parties.
- Ensures active participation of all stakeholders, including NGOs and local communities, in water management activities.
- Ensures reduction and control of pollution from all sources like agriculture, industrial activity, and urban areas, etc.
- Requires water pricing policies and ensures that the polluter pays.
- Balances the interests of the environment with those who depend on it.

> Water is a **fragile resource**

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 like agriculture, industry and households. In essence, the Framework Directive aims to prevent pollution at source and sets out a control mechanism 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 much of our groundwaters and surface waters are polluted today, they should all reach "good status" by 2015.

> Using water **sustainable**

Now we know that 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 to make sure there is enough water for future generations and that the water meets high quality standards. Managing waters sustainably is essential for our life.

> **Cross-border co-ordination** and new water **solidarity**

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 is the case, then the best way to manage water is by 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 in close co-operation. This stipulates that they 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. The Water Framework Directive attempts to stimulate solidarity around water management within river basins.

> Water is **everybody's issue**

And just as different countries will have to co-operate to protect water sources, so will several actors from various sectors. As we all use water in our daily 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 our impacts on 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.

> The **fair price** of water

Water is not a commercial product like any other but should be seen rather as a heritage. However, it is important to give water a price since pricing acts as an incentive to encourage more sustainable use and as such, many European countries have been pricing water for years. The Water Framework Directive requires Member States to develop water-pricing policies where all users - agricultural, industrial and households - contribute in an adequate 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. However, the Directive allows countries to provide water services at an affordable price for those in need.

> 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.

> Important **deadlines** of the Directive:

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