



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 11/24/2008

GAIN Report Number: E48135

EU-27

Agricultural Situation

EU Water Framework Directive 2008

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Report Highlights:

Water management is one of the major environmental priorities for the European Union. An estimated 20 percent of all surface water in the European Union is seriously threatened with pollution, and 50 percent of EU wetlands have endangered status due to ground water over-exploitation, which has been linked to salination in coastal areas. Since 1985, irrigated land area in Southern Europe has increased by 20 percent. The EU Water Framework Directive, adopted in October 2000, sets the objective of reaching "good ecological status" for all aquatic ecosystems by 2015.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Brussels USEU [BE2]
[E4]

EU WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

The [Renewed EU Sustainability Development strategy](#) was adopted by the European Council in 2006. One of the environmental issues of this strategy is "Conservation and management of natural resources", which includes water.

Agriculture is a significant user of water resources in the EU, accounting for around 30 percent of total water use. In southern EU, irrigation accounts for over 60 percent of water usage, whereas in northern Member States (MS) it ranges from 0-30 percent.

The sustainability of water resources is threatened in several of Europe's regions: salination of groundwater, the reduced flow in many water courses, and the diffuse pollution that can be attributed to agriculture, are a few examples.

In October 2000 the [EU Water Framework Directive \(WFD\)](#) was adopted. This Directive establishes an EU framework for the protection of inland surface waters (rivers and lakes), transitional waters (estuaries), coastal waters and ground water. The WFD aims to ensure that all aquatic ecosystems, terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands meet "good status" by 2015.

The WFD entered into force in December 2000 and MS were required to transpose it into national legislation by December 2003. One of the aims of the WFD is to rationalize the Community water legislation by replacing seven already existing Directives.

The WFD provides a framework for integrated management of groundwater and surface water for the first time at European level.

The key aims of the Directive are:

- Expanding the scope of water protection to all waters, surface waters and groundwater.
- Achieving a "good status" for all waters by a set deadline.
- Water management based on river basins.
- "Combined approach" of emission limit values and quality standards.
- Getting the process right.
- Getting the citizens involved more closely.
- Streamlining legislation.

One of the first tasks under the WFD was for MS to identify all their water bodies. More than 70,000 surface bodies were classified - 80 percent as rivers, 15 percent as lakes, and 5 percent as coastal and transitional water bodies. Each EU MS must also assess which water bodies risk not to be in "good ecological status by 2015. The results vary significantly across the EU. In the Netherlands over 95 percent is considered to be at risk, whereas in Estonia less than 20 percent was considered to be at risk.

River Basin Management

The Directive calls for water management centered on natural geographical and hydrological units (i.e. river basins), rather than administrative and political units. Several MS are already working on a river basin approach. For each river basin, the established management plan should be updated every six years.

The key management objectives are:

- General protection of the aquatic ecology
- Specific protection of unique and valuable habitats
- Protection of drinking water resources
- Protection of bathing water

Ecological protection broadly applies to all water. Other objectives, like special habitats or drinking water resources only apply to specific bodies of waters.

Timetable for implementation

Year	Issue
2000	Directive entered into force
2003	Transposition in national legislation Identification of River Basin Districts and Authorities
2004	Characterization of river basin: pressures, impacts and economic analysis
2006	Establishment of monitoring network Start public consultation (at the latest)
2008	Present draft river basin management plan
2009	Finalize river basin management plan including program of measures
2010	Introduce pricing policies
2012	Make operational programs of measures
2015	Meet environmental objectives First management cycle ends Second river basin management plan & first flood risk management plan.
2021	Second management cycle ends
2027	Third management cycle ends, final deadline for meeting objectives

Source: European Commission

Surface Water

Surface waters are all inland waters, except groundwater, transitional waters and coastal waters. In the respect of chemical status, territorial waters are also included in the definition for surface waters.

According to the European Commission, about 20 percent of the surface water in the European Union is seriously threatened with pollution.

The Directive sets a general requirement that all surface waters in the Union shall have "good ecological status" and "good chemical status". A good ecological status is defined in Annex V of the Directive, and contains a number of different parameters, such as: biological elements, hydromorphological elements supporting the biological elements, chemical and physico-chemical elements supporting the biological elements, and specific pollutants. MS will need to develop strategies for improving water eco-systems, reducing pollution, and minimizing morphological changes such as dams.

Ground Water

Ground water is a crucial source of drinking water; it represents about 65 percent of the drinking water in the Union, and in some MS almost all drinking water. Around 60 percent of European cities are overexploiting their ground water sources, and 50 percent of wetland in the EU have “endangered status” due to ground water exploitation.

Quantity is one of the major issues for ground water in the EU. An important portion of the annual recharge is needed to support ecosystems such as surface water and wetlands. Only the portion of the overall recharge not needed by these can be abstracted in sustainable management. The Directive limits abstraction to that quantity.

Given the presumption that groundwater should not be polluted at all, there are relatively few chemical quality standards for groundwater. At the EU level, quality standards focus primarily on nitrates, pesticides and biocides.

Water Pricing

The WFD requires MS to develop and introduce water-pricing policies no later than 2010. In general terms, all water users will be expected to contribute in an “appropriate way.” Costs will be calculated by economic sectors - households, industry and agriculture.

The “water price” is defined as being “the unit or overall amount paid by users for all of the services that they receive in terms of water, including the environment”. The WFD promotes the use of pricing and taxation as an incentive for consumers to use water resources in a more sustainable manner and to recover the cost of water services per sector of the economy.

The use of economic instruments such as taxes, duties, financial assistance and negotiable permits has gained increasing importance and was legitimized in the United Nations Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development in 1992. Within the European Union, the “polluter pays” principle underlies European environmental policy.

There are major differences between the water pricing systems in the MS. In the Southern European countries for example, agricultural users have preferential rates for water. New MS that joined the EU in 2004 are still working to expand their water pricing systems.

EU water pricing policies attempt to take the following factors into consideration:

- The demand for water. In EU agriculture this is not well understood, and measuring methods are still being developed.
- The price elasticity of the demand for water.
- The financial cost of water supplies.
- The environmental cost of the resource.

The European Commission says that for reasons of cost and political acceptability, the introduction of a new pricing system will have to be gradual. The WFD must ensure better synergy between water pricing policies and other EU policies such as the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) or the structural and cohesion policies which must also provide incentives for better use of water.

Prices will not be the same across the EU, but will differ depending on different factors and situations in different areas. What will be common is the transparency underpinning water

charging decisions across the EU. It will be clear who uses, who pollutes, what it costs and who pays for it.

The Directive also has special provisions for less favored areas so that basic services can still be provided at an affordable price.

Water Scarcity and Irrigation

Although the EU is considered to have adequate water resources, water scarcity is a growing concern across the Union. Water scarcity currently affects some 10 percent of the EU population and some 20 percent of the territory. Water scarcity is a more serious threat in the southern parts of the EU than in the north.

In France irrigators have to use water meters whenever they go beyond extraction thresholds. The share of irrigators' equipment rose from 54 percent to 71 percent between 2000 – 2003, representing 85 percent of the overall irrigated area. In Portugal more than 600,000 ha are allocated to irrigated agriculture, which accounts for 74.8 percent of all water uses. Portugal has increased water prices for agricultural and industrial users to tackle water scarcity. In Sweden there is no general legislation that farmers have to pay for their use of water, unless it's communal water. However they will need to have a permit if they take so much water it can affect the environment or other users. Should the outtake of water affect other activities in the area, it can be subject to a fee by the court.

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