

Addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union

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The Commission presented the [second follow-up Report to the](#) Communication on water scarcity and droughts in the European Union.

The aim of the report is to present the progress that has been achieved across Europe over the last year.

In April 2009 the European Commission presented a [White Paper](#) which sets out a framework for climate adaptation measures and policies to reduce the EU's vulnerability to the **impacts of climate change**. It stressed the need for further measures to enhance water efficiency and to increase resilience to climate change. 22 December 2009 was a milestone in European water policy. This is the date by which the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) required River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) to be adopted for all river basins across the EU. This will give a clearer overview of what Member States are planning in the respective river basins for tackling water scarcity and drought problems.

However, by December 2009, several of the Member States where water scarcity and drought is expected to be most severe had not adopted their plans.

The document specifies the progress made in the **seven key areas** which must be tackled if Europe is to move towards a water efficient and water saving economy. These areas may be summarised as follows:

1. Full implementation of the Water Framework Directive: in this context, setting water pricing policies in a manner consistent with water availability remains a challenge at all levels of governance;

moving towards sustainable land use planning and the need to improve the financing of water efficiency within the framework of existing sectoral policies.

2. Allocating water and water-related funding more efficiently: large-scale development of economic activities such as tourism or farming could lead to over-abstraction of waters which can cause significant problems, particularly in water-scarce areas. Several activities linked to land-use planning are ongoing across the EU both at European and at national level. In particular, as regards **agriculture**, to respond to new challenges, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) **Health Check** agreed in 2008 resulted in the inclusion of better water management objectives relating to cross-compliance. From 2010 Member States will have to define **standards applying at farm level** for compliance with existing national authorisation procedures when using water for irrigation. The Commission will carefully monitor the application of the cross-compliance rules resulting from the Health Check during the implementation phase. The **tourism** sector needs attention. A key challenge identified is to reduce water demand in the peak season and minimise resource use to reduce the ecological footprint and stress on water.

3. Improving drought risk management: as regards the development of drought risk management plans, the document considers that moving from 'crisis response' to 'risk management' in the context of water management is the way to improve society's resilience to water scarcity and droughts. The document states that the prototype of the **European Drought Observatory** (EDO) for drought forecasting, detection and monitoring in Europe is currently engaged in pre-operational production of drought indices using meteorological information.

It is also considered to further **optimise the use of the EU Solidarity Fund and the European Mechanism for Civil Protection**.

4. Considering additional water supply infrastructures: in those regions where water demand still exceeds the availability of resources, despite having exhausted all possible options to reduce water demand in line with the water hierarchy, new water supply infrastructures for the mitigation of drought effects could be considered. A study carried out for the Commission in December 2008 assessing the risks and impacts of four alternative water supply options (desalination, wastewater re-use, ground-water recharge, and rainwater harvesting) revealed that it is **not possible to provide an EU-wide set of best available mitigation options**. The documents highlights that the role of alternative water supply options will grow in the future due to climate change and the reduction of water availability, so particular attention should be paid to their implementation and the continuous improvement of knowledge in the field.

5. Fostering water-efficient technologies and practices: in July 2009 an assessment was finalised for the Commission showing that the introduction of mandatory requirements on water using devices under the extended Eco-design Directive could induce significant savings.

6. Fostering the emergence of a water-saving culture in Europe: following the adoption of the [revised EU Ecolabel Regulation](#) in November 2009, it is expected that the Ecolabel will play an increasingly important role in helping consumers buy environmentally friendly products, including those produced with lower water consumption and those that use less water. The **Greening** of Public Procurements is a major opportunity to stimulate the market for environmentally friendly products and technologies and to give priority to water-efficient products and technologies. The Commission strongly urges Member States to increase their level of green public procurement. The water **footprint** is increasingly used to raise consumers' awareness of water consumption. The Commission will consider whether it has a role to play in the future policy on water scarcity and droughts.

7. Improving knowledge and data collection: indicators are being produced under the Common Implementation of the WFD in co-ordination with the European Environmental Agency (EEA) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC). **Research and development projects** at both national and international level are playing a key role in seeking synergies between water scarcity and drought management policies. Following the request of the European Parliament the Commission will initiate pilot projects that could contribute to the work on tackling water scarcity and droughts.

Conclusion: the priorities of the 2007 Communication on water scarcity and droughts remain valid. Many measures have been implemented and actions carried out in response to the policy options identified in the Communication of 2007 but much **more effort is needed** to stop and reverse the process of over-exploitation of Europe's precious but limited water resources.

In 2010 the focus will be on water efficiency and in particular the potential for savings in domestic water use. The Commission will consider the options for EU measures on water savings that could be achieved by buildings (and will present them to stakeholders in 2011) and leakage reduction. The Commission's policy review on water scarcity and droughts in 2012 will focus on assessing what is being achieved and whether more action is needed.

The Commission is concerned that implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the Member States which are most affected by water scarcity is **delayed**. The Water Framework Directive requires the Commission to **publish, by 2012, a report on its implementation** which will review how Member States have tackled their river basin management planning. This policy review will contribute, together with a review of the vulnerability of environmental resources, to the Commission **Blueprint for safeguarding Europe's water resources** planned for 2012. The Blueprint will examine the effectiveness of current policies and the need for further policies or measures necessary to strengthen the resilience of EU water

policy to the impacts of climate change. In particular, the Blueprint will look into the need for improved implementation and additional legislation, funding, incentive measures and the establishment of the necessary support for data collection, and scientific and technological development.