

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

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The Commission presents the third follow up report to the Communication on water scarcity and droughts (WS&D) in the EU which identified seven policy areas that had to be addressed if Europe was to move towards a water-efficient economy. In June 2010, the Council recognised that WS&D are already serious problems in many European regions and invited the Member States to promote more efficient and sustainable water use and recalled that trustworthy data would be needed on WS&D events to support further policy development.

This report covers the period May 2009 to May 2010 and is based upon the responses of 21 countries to the Commission's annual questionnaire. It is focused on the building blocks of the future WS&D policy - water efficiency, better planning and adequate implementation instruments – which are key elements of the establishment of a water efficient economy that meets the challenge of the [EU 2020 strategy](#).

The situation concerning water scarcity was as follows:

- three Member States reported that they faced continuous water scarcity (CZ, CY, MT);
- five Member States reported that they faced droughts or rainfall levels lower than the long term average (FR, PT, HU, ES, UK); and
- four Member States experienced local limited water scarcity occurrences (FR, NL, RO and SE).

Consequently, mitigation actions were developed and restrictions were applied in order to restrict water use (FR), irrigation (RO, SE, CY) and shipping (NL) in some of the affected Member States. Six Member States reported that they did not experience drought or water scarcity situations (AT, BE, EE, IE, LU, SK), and the same applied to Switzerland (CH). The report gives further details on the extent of WS&D in the EU and the measures which are being put in place to address both situations. It also sets out the activities to be implemented by the Commission in preparation for the 2012 review of WS&D policy.

**Blueprint:** the Commission intends to adopt a "Blueprint" to safeguard Europe's waters by the end of 2012 based on assessments of the implementation of Directive 2000/60/EC (the Water Framework Directive or WFD), WS&D policy and the vulnerability of water resources to climate change and other man-made pressures. This evaluation has a twofold purpose:

- it will look back and assess the implementation and achievements of policies and measures in place to ensure the protection and availability of EU water resources, while identifying gaps and shortcomings;
- it will look forward at the evolving vulnerability of the water environment to identify measures and tools that will be needed in several EU policy areas in order to ensure a sustainable use of water in the EU in the long term;

The Blueprint will synthesise policy recommendations and will be accompanied by a number of new initiatives, including of a legislative nature if appropriate. It will also examine the needs for additional funding, incentives, measures and the establishment of the necessary support for data collection, scientific and technological development. It will consider the links between the various aspects of water policy, including those relating to quality and availability. The Blueprint will be developed in close consultation with stakeholders.

**Financing:** with regard to financing at EU level, the report notes that Member States plan to spend 26.9% of CAP Health-Check and European Economic Recovery

Plan (EERP) funds on water management. Of these funds, for the remainder of the current period, the various rural development programmes set out planned spending of EUR 184 million for water storage, EUR 568 million Euros on water savings technologies and EUR 119 million for wetland restoration. In the coming years rural development policy will remain an indispensable tool for improving care for the EU's precious water resources.

The **next milestone of the WS&D policy** is its review which will be published in 2012, in the Year of Water, as part of the Blueprint for Europe's waters.

In the next months, the Commission will focus on filling knowledge and data gaps and conducting an impact assessment for the review. The report notes that important knowledge gaps still exist as regards WS&D in the EU and trustworthy and comparable data are needed about the temporal and spatial distribution of water scarcity and droughts events, the expected impacts of climate change on water resources and the vulnerability of ecosystems, as well as the associated socio-economic aspects. As a part of the Common Implementation Strategy for the WFD period 2010-2012, an Expert Group is working on defining water scarcity and drought indicators. The Commission is also developing a set of vulnerability indicators for water related impacts under a set of climate change and socio-economic scenarios, and performing an inventory of potential adaptation measures and assessment of their impact, which gives a strong emphasis to WS&D issues.

The Commission has started an assessment of natural water retention measures and their potential impact i. e. on WS&D prevention. An upcoming Commission Communication will address the multiple benefits of green infrastructure including its role in water retention and mitigating the effects of extreme events.

The Commission's work on the review will be supported by the outcomes of the assessment of the River Basin Management Plans, the modelling of water vulnerability to man-made pressures, the cost-benefit analysis of natural water retention measures, the inputs from the Environmental Agency, the JRC and Eurostat and the forthcoming Communication on a road map towards a resource efficient economy.