

Framework for Community action in the field of water policy. Water Framework Directive

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The Commission presents its 5th report on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) based on the Commission's assessment of the second River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and first Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) prepared by Member States for the period 2015-2021.

The key objective of the Water Framework Directive is to achieve, by 2015, good status for over 111 000 surface waters (e.g. rivers, lakes, coastal waters) and over 13 000 groundwaters in EU territory. The Commission points out that, in its assessment, it considered, inter alia, comments made by the European Parliament on previous implementation reports. Parliament adopted a water-related [resolution in 2015](#) stressing the importance of water quality and quantity management, the need for full implementation of EU water law and for its increased integration into other EU policies. It called on the Member States to complete and implement their RBMPs and make relevant information available online. It highlighted also the synergies between the RBMPs and FRMPs.

Water Framework Directive – findings from the second RBMPs

The European Environment Agency's [State of Water report](#) of July 2018 provides detailed information on the status of Europe's water bodies, as reported by the Member States under the WFD. It shows that 74% of the EU groundwater bodies have by now achieved good chemical status and 89% of them have achieved good quantitative status.

The situation is less encouraging for surface waters: only 38% of them are in good chemical status and just 40% in good ecological status or potential. Some individual pollutants, the most common being mercury, have a large impact on status. The EEA report notes that **European waters remain under significant pressure** from both diffuse (e.g. agriculture, transport infrastructure) and point-source (e.g. industry or energy production) generated pollution, over-abstraction and hydro-morphological changes stemming from a range of human activities.

Overall, substantial efforts have been made to implement the WFD. Better implementation of other closely linked pieces of EU law also had a positive effect. This concerns in particular the [Urban Waste Water Treatment](#), [the Nitrates](#), and the [Industrial Emissions](#) Directives and EU law on chemicals. However, compared to the 2009-2015 cycle, only a limited number of water bodies have improved in status. This may be due to: (i) late identification of pressures, (ii) the longer time required to design effective policy measures, (iii) the slow introduction of measures, the response time of nature before measures take effect, (iv) heightened quality standards and improved monitoring and reporting that reveals water bodies previously qualified to be in 'unknown' status to actually be 'unsatisfactory'.

The WFD requires Member States to identify a **Programme of Measures** to achieve good status. As regards water bodies affected by water abstraction, the key measures have generally been defined, but their implementation is uneven across Europe and thus pressures are only slowly reduced. The fact that most Member States exempt small abstractions from controls or registration is potentially problematic. A lack of control and registration can be of concern particularly in Member States that already have water scarcity problems and in water bodies that face quantitative problems.

The report goes on to note that Member States have taken steps to define water services, calculating financial costs, metering, performing economic analysis and assessing both environmental and resource costs when calculating the **cost recovery amounts** for water services. However, significant gaps remain in translating these improved elements of economic analysis into concrete measures and achieving more harmonised approaches to estimate and integrate environmental and resource costs. Increased investments are essential to meet the objectives of the WFD. Further progress in the economic underpinning of the Programme of Measures would greatly facilitate water-related decisions and investments.

Recommendations

The report indicates that for the third RBMPs Member States should: (i) continue improving stakeholder involvement, with active participation in the planning process and the integration of their contributions in the RBMPs; (ii) clearly identify the gap to good status for individual pressures and water bodies and design, fund and implement targeted Programme of Measures to close it; (iii) reduce reliance on exemptions to ensure a timely achievement of the WFD objectives and improve transparency in relation to the justifications used; (iv) ensure the proper implementation of Article 9 on cost recovery, including the calculation and internalisation of environment and resource costs for all activities with a significant impact on water bodies and the economic analysis to underpin the Programme of Measures.

The report states that the path towards full compliance with the WFD's objectives by 2027, after which exemption possibilities are limited, seems at this stage very challenging. Reporting showed indeed that, although further measures will be taken until 2021, many others would be needed beyond 2021.

The Commission will follow-up as relevant with the Member States on the recommendations contained in this report and its accompanying documents, to secure a better implementation of the requirements under the Water Framework Directive. A stepped up enforcement of the legal obligations covering key pressures on the aquatic environment, such as those stemming from the Nitrates and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directives, will also be pursued.