Urban wastewater treatment. Recast

2022/0345(COD) - 12/12/2024 - Final act

PURPOSE: to protect the environment and public health, to make progress in achieving climate neutrality for urban wastewater collection and treatment activities, to improve access to sanitation and to ensure the regular surveillance of parameters relevant to public health.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Directive (EU) 2024/3019 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast).

CONTENT: the revised directive:

- lays down rules on the **collection, treatment and discharge of urban wastewater**, to protect the environment and human health, in line with the One Health approach, while progressively reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to sustainable levels, improving the energy balance of urban wastewater collection and treatment activities and contributing to the transition towards a circular economy;

- establishes rules on access to sanitation for all, on transparency of the urban wastewater sector, on the regular surveillance of relevant public health parameters in urban wastewater and on the implementation of the polluter-pays principle.

Collecting systems and calculation of the load of an agglomeration

Member States must ensure that all agglomerations with a population equivalent (p.e) of 2000 or more are equipped with collecting systems and that all their domestic waste water sources are connected to these systems. Agglomerations with a population **equivalent of 1000 or more but less than 2000 p.e** must comply with these obligations by **31 December 2035**. Member States with a large number of small agglomerations affected by the new requirements for the collecting and treatment of urban waste water for agglomerations with a population equivalent of between 1000 and 2000 p.e are allowed to set **longer deadlines** for compliance with these new requirements.

If the installation of a collecting system is not justified, or is not feasible or cost-effective, Member States may use individual systems for the collection and treatment of urban waste water. The directive sets a deadline of 2033 for Member States to draw up an **integrated urban waste water management plan** covering agglomerations with a p.e of more than 100 000, and a deadline of 2039 for agglomerations at risk with a p.e of between 10 000 and 100 000. These integrated management plans will be reviewed at least every six years.

Secondary treatment

The directive extends the obligation to apply secondary treatment (i.e. **removal of biodegradable organic matter**) to urban waste water before its discharge into the environment to all agglomerations with a **p.e of 1000 or more by 2035**. The directive introduces a number of derogations, notably for small agglomerations discharging into coastal waters, for discharges into less sensitive areas and for Member States that have recently joined the EU, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

Tertiary treatment

Tertiary treatment (i.e. **elimination of nitrogen and phosphorus**) will be applied in **30 %** of treatment plants of 150 000 p.e. or more by 31 December **2033** and in **70%** of treatment plants by 31 December **2036**

. By 31 December 2039, tertiary treatment will be applied in all treatment plants of 150 000 p.e. or more. All treatment plants of **10 000 p.e**. or more should be covered from **2045**, with intermediate targets set in 2033, 2036 and 2039.

By way of derogation, Member States may decide that an individual urban wastewater treatment plant located in an area on the list of areas of their territory that are subject to eutrophication will not be subject to the requirements established by the directive, under certain conditions.

Quaternary treatment

Member States must ensure that discharges from urban wastewater treatment plants treating a load of **150 000 p.e. and above** meet the relevant requirements for quaternary treatment of urban wastewater before discharge into receiving waters by: (a) 31 December **2033** for discharges from 20 % of these urban wastewater treatment plants; (b) 31 December **2039** for discharges from 60 % of these urban wastewater treatment plants; (c) 31 December **2045** for all discharges from these urban wastewater treatment plants.

In order to cover the additional costs due to quaternary treatment and in accordance with the polluter pays principle, manufacturers of pharmaceutical and cosmetic products which cause pollution of urban waste water by micropollutants will have to contribute at least 80% of the costs of this additional treatment, in accordance with the **'polluter pays' principle**.

Energy neutrality and renewable energy

Member States will have to ensure that energy audits of urban waste water treatment plants and collecting systems in operation are carried out every four years. These audits must include an assessment of the potential for cost-effective measures to reduce energy consumption and increase the use and production of renewable energy.

The new rules introduce an energy neutrality target, meaning that by 2045, urban waste water treatment plants treating a load of 10 000 p.e or more will have to use energy produced from renewable sources by the installations concerned.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 1.1.2025.

TRANSPOSITION: no later than 31.7.2027.