

# Protection of groundwater against pollution and environmental quality standards in the field of water policy

2022/0344(COD) - 20/04/2026 - Final act

**PURPOSE:** to ensure a high level of environmental protection and improve the environmental quality of European freshwaters.

**LEGISLATIVE ACT:** Directive (EU) 2026/805 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2000/60/EC establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, Directive 2006/118/EC on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration and Directive 2008/105/EC on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy.

**CONTENT:** this directive amends the Water Framework Directive, the Groundwater Directive and the Environmental Quality Standards Directive, aligning European water policy with the latest scientific data.

The directive aims to **update the list of pollutants that threaten surface water and groundwater**. The revised rules also tighten environmental standards for several substances and strengthen monitoring across the EU.

## *Groundwater and surface water alert lists*

The watch lists for both groundwater and surface water must be established by implementing act within **two years** and then revised every three years. The directive makes monitoring of substances on the watch lists **mandatory** in groundwater and streamlines the monitoring procedure for substances on the watch lists for surface water and groundwater.

The directive also adds **microplastics and antimicrobial resistance** to future watch lists as soon as appropriate methods have been developed, so that data on their concentration in water can be collected to facilitate the development of a risk assessment method.

## *Monitoring*

Regarding the frequency of monitoring of substances behaving as **persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic (PBT) substances**, Member States may carry out less intensive monitoring than that required for priority substances, but such monitoring must take place at least every three years. **Effects-based monitoring methods** will be mandatory for two years for estrogenic substances in surface waters, to allow the Commission to collect data.

## *List of substances*

To improve water quality, the EU has already put in place rules to monitor and reduce discharges of identified hazardous substances and pollutants into surface water and groundwater. The list of these substances for the entire EU has been expanded and updated, and now includes:

- **pharmaceutical products** (such as painkillers): a uniform quality standard is set for the various pharmaceutical substances of national concern in groundwater;

- **pesticides**: with regard to **groundwater**, the directive retains the ‘median value’ of 1 g/l and a total of 5 g/l while allowing Member States to set a more or less strict individual standard if this is justified by available data on the toxicity of the substance; with regard to **surface water**, a quality standard for the sum of pesticides which are already on the list of priority substances to be monitored is set, with a value of 0.2 g/l for fresh water;

- **per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS, a group of ‘forever chemicals’)**: with regard to surface waters, the directive sets a strict standard of 0.0044 g/l for a sum of 24 PFAS and also adds TFA (trifluoroacetic acid) to this sum of 24 PFAS, to make it a sum of 25 PFAS;

- **bisphenol A**, now classified as a priority hazardous substance, while **atrazine** is declassified.

For the first time, the directive establishes rules for assessing the **cumulative risk** arising from the combination of substances.

### ***Monitoring and reporting obligations***

The updated directive strengthens monitoring and reporting obligations for EU countries, aiming to improve water quality and transparency across the EU. Furthermore, Member States will be able to use remote sensing and Earth observation technologies for their monitoring. They must report on the biological quality, chemical quality, and overall status of water bodies to ensure more reliable data across the EU.

### ***Joint monitoring mechanism***

The Commission will be responsible for assessing the feasibility of setting up a common surveillance mechanism to help Member States, on a voluntary basis, to manage surveillance requirements.

### ***Extended producer responsibility***

The Commission will prepare, within three years of the entry into force of the amending directive, a report assessing, in particular, the possibility of requiring producers who place on the EU market products containing priority substances and priority hazardous substances to contribute to the costs of monitoring programmes.

### ***Cross-border cooperation***

The directive strengthens cross-border cooperation, ensuring that affected Member States and the Commission are immediately informed of exceptional circumstances related to extreme flooding, prolonged droughts or accidental transboundary pollution, and that adequate cooperation is put in place.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 10.5.2026.

TRANSPOSITION: no later than 21.12.2027. As regards, the compliance deadline for newly identified substances, the Directive foresees for both surface and groundwater compliance by the **end of 2039**, with a possibility to apply time-related exemptions for one more cycle, i.e. up to end 2045.