Water policy: quality of bathing water

1994/0006(COD) - 14/02/1994

PREVIOUS COMMUNITY LEGISLATION: Council Directive 76/160/EEC (OJ L 31, 5.2.1976, p.1): Setting of quality standards for bathing water in the Member States (with the exception of water intended for therapeutic purposes or used in swimming pools). Council Directive 91/692/EEC (OJ L 377, 31.12.1991, p. 48): New test methods and requirement to submit annual reports to the Commission (see also Commission Decision 92/446/EEC (OJ L 247, 27.8.1992, p. 10) concerning questionnaires relating to directives in the water sector). PREVIOUS POSITION OF EP: In an own-initiative resolution (Doc. A1-194/84; OJ C 172, 2.7.1984, p. 158), Parliament called for the introduction of a common system for warning bathers about water which is highly polluted and hence very likely to present a health hazard. In a resolution on the implementation of Community legislation on water protection measures (Doc. A2-298 /87; OJ C 94, 11.4.1988, p. 155), Parliament called on the Commission inter alia to submit a proposal for a regulation introducing a common system of information for the public about the quality of bathing water. It also advocated that the Commission should investigate the possibility of deploying Community environmental inspectors. SITUATION IN THE MEMBER STATES The Commission's Eleventh Annual Report on Monitoring the Application of Community Law (1993), (COM (94) 0500, p. 91), indicates that bathing water quality has improved: Spain has submitted quality improvement plans, which are currently under scutiny. The situation has also improved in Luxembourg, so that the Commission has been able to terminate the relevant proceedings. The Commission has addressed a reasoned opinion to Ireland, owing to its failure to implement Council Directive 76/160/EEC in the case of Bantry Bay. On 14 July 1993, the European Court of Justice gave judgment against the United Kingdom, owing to its failure to guarantee thequality of bathing water at Blackpool and neighbouring Southport (Case C-90/56). On 7 June 1994, the Commission published its Eleventh Report on Bathing Water Quality, which relates to the 1993 bathing season and covers the inspection of 16 445 bathing waters. In 1993, 90% of all such waters met the quality standards required by the Directive. These reports are published annually at the beginning of each bathing season in order to provide the public with comprehensive information. The FEEE (Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe), a private organization which receives support from the Commission, organizes an annual 'blue flag' campaign. Any bathing beach awarded a blue flag does not pose a health risk to bathers, as it has to satisfy all the criteria listed in the Annex to Council Directive 76/160/EEC. Blue flags were awarded to 1 203 bathing waters during the 1993 bathing season, and to 1 454 in 1994.