Pollution, public health: quality of bathing water (repeal. Directive 76/160/EEC)

2002/0254(COD) - 24/10/2002 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to present a proposal for a Directive which aims to revise the Bathing Water Directive.
CONTENT : protection of the bathing waters has been one of the most successful elements of European Water Policy. The 1976 Bathing Water Directive has also resulted in unprecedented public awareness. The directive requires changes, due to changes in science and technology as well as managerial experience. Furthermore, the provisions of the Bathing Water directive must be entirely compatible with the recent Water Framework directive. These are some of the main provisions of the proposal: As regards the scope of the proposed Directive, the main aim of the 1976 directive was improving water quality and thereby protecting the Health of citizens who use natural water for bathing. Recreational use of water has changed significantly since then to include activities such as surfing, kayaking and windsurfing. Member States must ensure that relevant information is provided to the public, identifying clearly whether water quality monitoring and other management practices ensure an equal level of protection for practitioners of these sports. This will have an impact on the classification (quality label) which the bathing waters will receive. Concerning the parameters, the 1976 directive established 19 parameters, against the then prevailing background of knowledge. The Commission now proposes a drastic reduction in the number of parameters, from 19 to 2 key microbiological parameters in the new directive, complemented by visual inspection (algae bloom, oil) and pH measurement in fresh waters. There are two reasons for this. The first is that microbiological pollution is, in the vast majority of cases, the limiting factor for achieving good water bathing quality. Secondly, the Water Framework directive has established a comprehensive chemical and biological monitoring system for all waters to be operational by the end of 2006. The two faecal indicator parameters retained are Intestinal Enterococci (IE) and Escherichia coli (EC). With regard to the parametric values, the proposal highlights that based on studies, the Commission proposes a legally binding 'Good quality' value and an 'Excellent quality' guide value for IE and EC concentration as set out in the directive. As regards monitoring, there will be flexibility on monitoring frequencies, allowing for a reduction of sampling of bathing waters without major problems and continued monitoring at routine frequencies in the case of problem waters. In terms of the standards for handling samples, it is considered appropriate to establish guidelines for this. The directive foresees adaptation to new (ISO-CEN) standards which are currently in preparation. Lastly, as regards the management issue, the Authorities are given an important role in developing bathing water profiles, identifying sources of contamination and analysing information, and providing information to the public. Bathing waters are classified as 'poor', 'good' or 'excellent'. The latter can only be obtained if the quality complies with the standard in the directive and if management measures have taken into account the range of recreational water uses practised at the bathing area. Even if 'good' is not achieved, a bathing water will still be regarded as conforming with the directive if waters will comply will comply with the directive within three years.