Quality of water intended for human consumption. Drinking Water Directive

1995/0010(SYN) - 22/04/1998

A measure to ensure the quality of Europe's drinking water received the go-ahead from the Committee on the Protection. Adopting a report by its chairman, Mr Ken COLLINS (PES, UK), the committee approved unopposed with one abstention a recommendation to Parliament for a second reading, under the cooperation procedure, on the Council's common position on a proposed Council Directive (revising Directive 80/778/EEC) on the quality of water intended for human consumption. The intention is to protect human health by ensuring that such water is wholesome and clean. The directive covers water (including bottled water) intended for drinking or cooking as well as (in certain circumstances) water used in food production. Natural mineral waters, covered by other legislation, are excluded. The directive sets maximum concentrations for certain microbiological materials (such as E. Coli) and chemical substances (such as cyanide, arsenic, lead and pesticides). It also deals with domestic water distribution systems, water monitoring programmes, methods of analysis and remedial action. In addition, consumers must be adequately informed about water quality. Of the 62 amendments adopted by Parliament at its first reading in December 1996, 40 have been accepted, at least partially, by the Council. In his report, Mr Collins says: "On the whole the Council and Commission have done a good job and the common position has incorporated many of the principles and policies that the rapporteur believes should form the basis of a sound drinking water policy." The amendments adopted included restricting derogations and allowing Member States to adopt more stringent standards than those laid down in the directive. In addition, water for human consumption must be free from endocrine-disrupting chemicals and water catchment areas must be protected taking full account of the precautionary and polluter-pays principles. Another amendment requires Member States to come forward within five years with a plan to replace the lead piping in homes. Member States must also ensure that a supply of wholesome water to meet domestic requirements is maintained at all times.