Implementation of directive 91/676/EEC on nitrates

2000/2110(INI) - 05/12/2000

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Robert GOODWILL (EPP-ED, UK) on the implementation of the 1991 directive on nitrates. The first point made by the committee was that the immediate priority should be to implement the existing legislation rather than to redraft and reform the directive. It was critical of the Member States, with the exception of Denmark and Sweden, for the inadequate implementation of the directive hitherto, pointing out that they had failed to achieve the stated aim of reducing nitrate pollution and preventing the problem of eutrophication. The report also pointed out that the Commission had been slow to censure Member States for non-compliance and urged the Commission to continue to use the appropriate legal enforcement means within its powers to ensure proper implementation of the directive and to act more speedily whenever it detected a breach of the Member States' obligations. Farmers in Member States which complied with the directive were at a competitive disadvantage to those who did not meet its exacting requirements, and this was particularly true in the case of Denmark. The Commission should therefore take all necessary steps to ensure full EU-wide compliance with the directive to remedy this unfair situation and set a clear deadline for full implementation. In this context, the committee also pointed out that nitrate use in the applicant states was at present relatively low and that this good starting position should be maintained. Full implementation of the directive in the 15 current Member States would enable the EU to press for environmental improvements and the harmonisation of environmental legislation in the applicant countries before accession without being accused of hypocrisy. The committee made a number of recommendations for more effective implementation of the directive, such as the introduction of Community guidelines for the sampling of waters to enable direct comparisons between the performance of Member States in achieving the aims of the directive, the use of computer modelling for the accurate prediction of fertiliser requirements and better practical and technical support for farmers in the task of reducing nitrate leaching from the soil (such as free soil analyses and aid for the sustainable processing of animal manure). It called for wetlands to be re-established wherever possible and for plantation of set-aside areas with certain renewable raw materials in order to reduce leaching of nitrates. Lastly, it called on the Commission to compile a catalogue of measures that had proved effective in countries where the directive had been implemented successfully, including the expansion of organically farmed areas, incentives for farmers who used environmentally-friendly methods of cultivation, increased afforestation and the establishment of fertiliser limits for individual holdings, with a system of fines if such limits were exceeded.