

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

2002/0254(COD) - 01/10/2003

The committee adopted the report by Jules MAATEN (ELDR, NL) amending the Commission proposal under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure. The key amendments were as follows: - it should be clearly specified that the directive's objectives include protecting human health against chemical and microbiological contamination; - the scope of the directive should also cover water more than 100 metres from the shore at low tide if urban waste water is discharged through pipes in such waters. This would protect surfers, windsurfers and kayakers, who practise their activities far out from the shore, from pollution; - the committee introduced a new article providing for two systems to deal with periods of "transitory contamination" (i.e. short periods during which the water quality does not meet the microbiological standards for "good" status). It also made provision for public information in such circumstances; - in the event of an emergency, public authorities should work with all interested parties to ensure that the public is clearly informed of any potential hazards through temporary signs at the bathing site; - should the quality of the water deteriorate to a level which may pose a threat to bather's health, public authorities should impose a temporary ban on bathing; - if a bathing area has been removed from the list of bathing waters, the public should be informed of this fact through warning signs at the beach; - the committee decided a more user-friendly approach to information was needed and called for Commission-approved symbols to be prominently displayed to inform the public about the current quality of bathing water at any particular site. After consulting the Member States, tourist and consumer organisations, the Commission should within two years develop a simple standardised system of symbols (e.g. smiling faces) to be used by public authorities and tourist offices as a means to indicate water quality. The system should be made available on an EU website; - the information disseminated by the Member States should include at least an English and French translation; - results of water inspections should be available on the internet within a week.