Water policy: pollution by nitrates from agricultural sources (implem. Directive 91/676 /EEC)

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OBJECTIVE: to summarise the reports submitted to the Commission by the Member States pursuant to Article 11 of Directive 91/676/EEC on nitrates. SUBSTANCE: in direct conjunction with the 1997 report on the implementation of Directive 91/676/EC on pollution of waters by nitrates, the Commission presents a report summarising the measures taken by Member States to implement the Directive. The measures concern monitoring of waters, designation of vulnerable zones, drafting and promotion of codes of good agricultural practice and the implementation of action programmes relating to the least polluting agricultural practices. Presented belatedly, on account of the Member States' delays in notifying the Commission of the measures in question, the report particularly regrets the lack of coherence of the information received, and even its inadequacy in relation to the objectives of the Directive. Apart from the fact that three Member States (Belgium, Spain and Italy) did not supply the Commission with any information at all about their implementing measures, the information submitted was not well harmonised and therefore in many cases useless. In future the Commission intends to use harmonised forms indicating systematically the information to be submitted. As regards the measures adopted, more specifically, the report indicates that: -with regard to identification of polluted areas and designation of vulnerable zones, of the 12 Member States which submitted reports, 5 simply designated their entire territory (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands). The other 7 supplied information only about monitoring of polluted areas. The information relates to surface waters, groundwater and eutrophication; -with regard to codes of good agricultural practice, these have been drawn up in all the Member States which submitted reports except Portugal. In most cases, there is a single document. However, the legislation of some countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, already incorporated all the measures envisaged. Other countries, such as Germany and Luxembourg, combined the code-of-conduct measures and action programmes in the form of an Act of Parliament. Most countries supplied information on how they promote the codes. The methods included providing advisers, organising training courses, holding seminars and distributing information in writing; -with regard to action programmes, the information concerned the measures actually adopted in the Member States and the programmes to monitor changes to agricultural practices (e.g. in Austria and Denmark). Information was also provided about the reaction time of waters to the measures taken (only Sweden was able to give an estimate: by 2005 it would have attained the objective of reducing the anthropogenic nitrogen load in marine waters by 50%).