Assessment and management of flood risks

2006/0005(COD) - 18/01/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to reduce and manage the risks which floods pose to human health, the environment, infrastructure and property.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: between 1998 and 2004, Europe suffered over 100 major floods. These floods caused some 700 fatalities, the displacement of about half a million people and insured economic losses totalling at least EUR 25 billion. Assets at risk include private housing, transport and public service infrastructure, commercial and industrial enterprises and agricultural land. More than 10 million people live in areas at risk of extreme floods along the Rhine and the potential damage from floods totals EUR 165 billion. In addition, floods can have severe environmental consequences, such as affecting waste water treatment plants or factories holding large quantities of toxic chemicals. Floods can also destroy wetland areas and reduce biodiversity.

Although the Commission has a tradition of environmental legislation on water quality, to date the Commission has taken no measures to reduce and manage floods. Its justification for presenting this proposal is based on the fact that most of Europe's river basins are shared. Rivers and regional seas are not confined to existing geo-political boundaries, instead most river basins and coastal areas are shared between various countries. Under these conditions, a purely national approach to flood risk management, the Commission argues, is neither technically nor economically feasible. Concerted Community action could bring considerable added value and improve the overall level of flood protection. The Commission is preparing this proposal following the publication of its Communication on flood risk management and following a 2004 Council conclusion, in which the Council requested the Commission to submit an appropriate proposal on the management of floods in the EU. The proposal is also being presented following extensive consultation with stakeholders and interested parties. The consultation process revealed broad support for the suggested approach being proposed.

In summary, the proposed Directive would provide for flood mapping in all areas at risk of significant flooding, for co-ordination within shared river basins and for producing flood risk management plans through a broad participatory processes. The Directive allows for considerable Member State flexibility, allowing them to determine the level of protection required, the measures to be taken to achieve this level of protection and the timetables for implementing flood risk management plans. River basins, sub-basins and regions which are not at significant risk may be exempted from the any measures under the Directive.

The proposed Directive is closely linked to the implementation of Water Framework Directive. As such, the Commission proposes to fully align the organisational and institutional aspects and timing between the Directives based on the river basin districts, the competent authorities and the committee established by the WFD. Once the Flood Directive is adopted, implementation of the two Directives will be closely co-ordinated. The Commission points out that the objective of the Directive, namely Member State co-operation and co-ordinated planning has already commenced under the auspices of International River Commissions such as those for the Danube, Oder, Elbe, Rhine, Maas and the Scheldt.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS :

While implementation and financing of environmental policy is as a rule a right and obligation of the Member States (Article 175(4) of the EC Treaty), the Community has a variety of funding mechanisms which can be used to promote flood protection, e.g. under research policy, cohesion policy and

agricultural (rural development) policy. Flood-related initiatives and measures are eligible both under the legislation in force in these policy areas and under legislation proposed for 2007 - 2013. However, this proposal will have no financial implications beyond the proposals already adopted by the Commission.