Protection of groundwater: prevention and control of pollution

2003/0210(COD) - 25/04/2006

The committee adopted the report by Christa KLASS (EPP-ED, DE) amending the Council's common position under the 2nd reading of the codecision procedure. MEPs reintroduced a number of amendments adopted by Parliament at 1st reading which had not been taken up by the Council. These sought inter alia to put greater emphasis on prevention. The main amendments thus reinstated were as follows:

- the title of the proposal and articles therein should make it clear that the aim is to prevent the "deterioration" as well as the pollution of groundwater;

- where the rules on nitrates and pesticides would require changes to farming practices, special aid to farmers should be provided under the rural development plans of the common agricultural policy;

- certain terms should be defined, given that they are fundamental to the interpretation of the legislative text, i.e. 'deterioration', 'background concentration', and 'the baseline concentration';

- the groundwater quality standards applicable to the good chemical status of groundwater should be based on the human and eco-toxicological criteria underpinning the definition of pollution in Article 2(33) of the 2000 Water Framework Directive (WFD);

- as natural levels of pollutants, which differ widely in Europe, cannot be taken into account when quality standards are laid down, it must be made clear what should happen if the natural levels ('background concentrations') already exceed the quality standards. In such cases, the higher natural levels should be regarded as the quality standard/threshold value;

- it should be made clear in the annex that chloride and sulphate are not pollutants;

- given that classification of the body of groundwater as having good or poor status on the basis of measurements is a key feature of the directive, the provisions governing classification must be absolutely clear. Measurements at individual measurement points which do not comply with the standard should be used to determine classification only where experts have assessed that the measurement point is representative of the body of groundwater, or at least a part of it;

- a revision clause should be introduced to ensure that the list of groundwater quality standards and the list of threshold values is reviewed at regular intervals and that Parliament is involved in the legislation through codecision;

- provisions on measurement methods should be introduced, giving the Commission the authority to approve national methods to ensure that they are fully comparable;

- the Commission should promote new research to improve the technologies available for the monitoring and management of groundwater bodies and their quality, including with regard to ecosystems;

- the Commission and the Member States should establish a common methodology for defining protection areas for aquifers which supply spas and medicinal water sources, to ensure that these areas are respected when industrial and urban activities are planned;

- the threshold value set in Directive 98/83/EC for the sum of pesticides and related substances (less than 0,5 g/l) should be included in this directive as well in order to ensure proper protection of groundwater.

Lastly, MEPs called for the directive to be the subject of an overall efficiency assessment by 2015.