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# THE EEB'S MAIN PRIORITIES ON THE BLUEPRINT TO SAFEGUARD EUROPE'S WATER RESOURCES



EUROPE'S LARGEST FEDERATION OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENS' ORGANISATIONS



EUROPEAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
BUREAU



*Twelve years after the adoption of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the European Union is now taking stock of what progress has been made in the field of water management. It will look at how policies need to be adapted to future challenges, such as climate change. In late 2012 the European Commission will present its 'Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources' including policy proposals up to 2020.*

*The European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the largest federation of environmental NGOs in the EU, believes this opportunity should not be missed. So far, Member States have been making maximum use of the flexibility provided by the Water Framework Directive, postponing action to after 2015 and exempting the most important sectors from the scope of measures. As a result, inadequate surface and groundwater conditions continue to be a problem, and aquatic ecosystems are further declining. It is still mostly the individual taxpayer who bears the brunt of financing water management, while economic actors use or pollute water almost for free. The Blueprint gives Europe the opportunity to reboot the reform of water management.*

*The European Commission must make it clear how it wants to get a grip on the implementation of its water policy. Member States should stop desperately protecting economic sectors instead of scarce water resources. This is in the interest of society as a whole, which needs abundant, healthy, good quality water to prosper in the future. Changing water management is a challenge but I believe it is possible if the EU as a whole commits itself to its ecological obligations.*

Jeremy Wates  
Secretary General



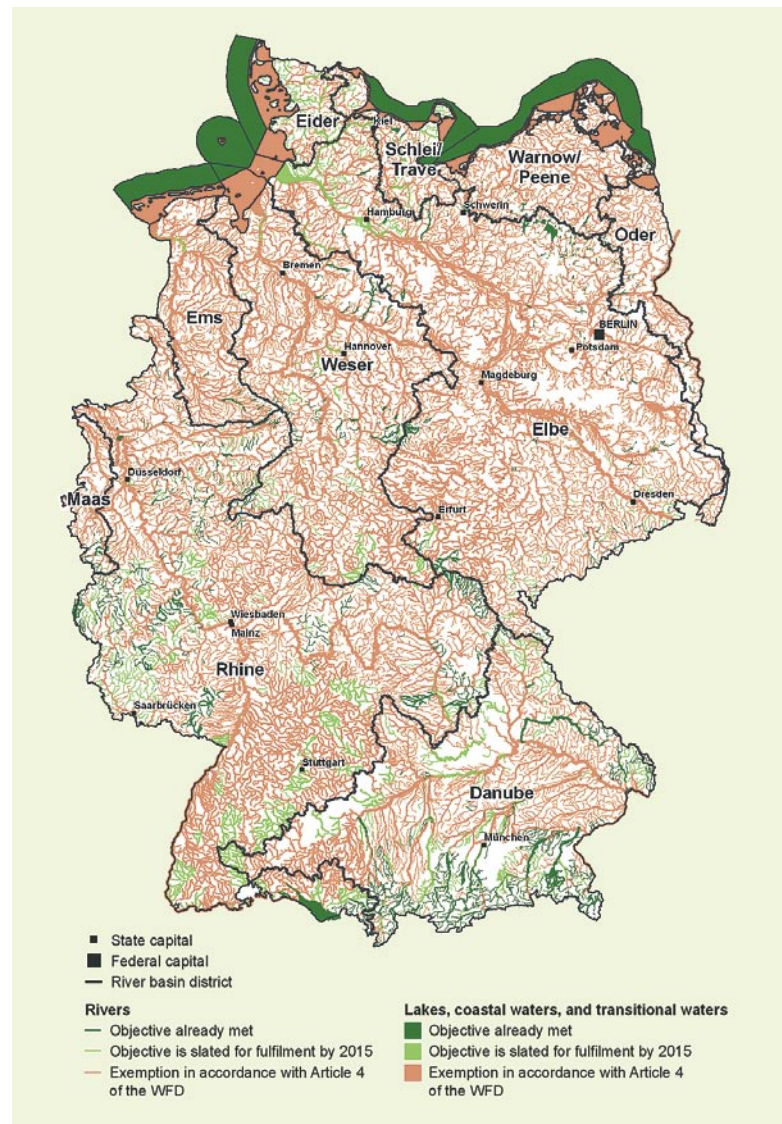
# 1. IMPROVING ENFORCEMENT – TACKLING EXEMPTIONS AND DELAYS

The implementation of the WFD is fundamentally undermined by the wide-spread use of exemptions and the possibility given to Member States to postpone measures until 2027. The granting of **exemptions and postponements has become the norm under the WFD**. Therefore, most of us who read this paper might sooner see our hair turn grey than the WFD deliver its benefits to society. The European Commission, therefore, should be given more resources to handle the misuse of delays and exemptions by Member States.



EEB has selected 10 large European rivers and looked at their current status as well as how the WFD has influenced their situation. Source: EEB, 2012. In "The Truth behind the CAP" EEB looked at the impact of CAP on the European environment, including its impacts on water. > <http://www.eeb.org>

It should be able to decide if delays and exemptions should be granted, and strictly enforce the law if there is a question of misuse. We expect the **European Commission to significantly improve its enforcement action** on the WFD (inspections, surveillance and legal action) to make it work and to achieve the improvement of Europe's waters in our lifetime. **The EEB calls for a new Directive as well as the establishment of an EU inspectorate to better enforce environmental legislation, including the WFD.**



Exemptions and delays have become the rule in the first River Basin Management Plans. The example of Germany shows that only a tiny portion of the country's rivers are scheduled to improve to good status by 2015. The situation is similar in all EU countries. Source: ©Portal WasserBLick/BfG, last updated 22 March 2010. Published in: Water Framework Directive – The way towards healthy waters, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), 2010, p.39

## 2. SAVE EUROPEAN FRESHWATER BIODIVERSITY FROM INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE



*Infrastructure projects for hydropower, flood protection and navigation pose serious threats to the EU's last natural rivers.  
Tagliamento river, Italy, photo: ©Nobert Müller*

Today we are witnessing a freshwater biodiversity crisis in Europe: according to the European Red List and the analyses of the European Freshwater Fish dataset published in November 2011, 37% of European freshwater fish species (and 44% of freshwater molluscs) are considered threatened<sup>1</sup>.

Thus we believe that there is an **extremely limited potential for building new hydropower plants** in the EU. The remaining free-flowing and unregulated river stretches of Europe should be **protected for their ecological/biodiversity potential**. Europe should make significant efforts to **restore past damage** caused by dams and other river infrastructure.

Sustainable use of renewable energy must be combined with ambitious energy efficiency objectives, to ensure that new renewable production does not contribute to a growing

overall energy demand. To achieve this, **a binding energy reduction target** in the framework of the Energy Efficiency Directive should be agreed. Secondly, **planning and prioritization should take place at the highest level**, taking biodiversity and energy objectives fully and equally into account. Thirdly, **energy efficiency and energy saving should be prioritized** everywhere over building new capacity. It is especially in cases where the damage to biodiversity caused by new plants would be unacceptable that energy efficiency and saving should be prioritized.

Fourthly, the Commission, as a guardian of the Treaties, has **to ensure that countries fully comply not only with energy but also with biodiversity legislation and respective politically agreed objectives**. The sustainability of hydropower projects has to be assessed in light of the damage that they causes to aquatic ecosystems and the environmental, as well as of the social and economic costs

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<sup>1</sup> Freyhof, J. and Brooks, E.: European Red List of Freshwater Fishes. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. 2011





*Without proper fish protection, migratory fish such as the endangered Eel suffer severe damage or death in hydropower plants.  
photo: ©Ingenieurbüro Floecksmühle GmbH*

entailed. This issue clearly requires **much stricter application of existing legislation, especially Art. 4.7 WFD**. The EC must insist that Member States fully document and prove that no energy saving or generating alternatives exist. It should also be willing to challenge Member States on their alternative energy options considered during planning. If increased energy efficiency, energy saving or another environmentally friendlier alternative could render a new, damaging

development redundant, this is something that has to be enforced.

The EEB believes that the sustainability of **developing inland navigation** has to be assessed including all ecological and socio-economic aspects as well as costs. It is possible to improve the sustainability of inland navigation if the ecological integrity of the river waterway is respected.



*River engineering projects on the Danube and its tributaries are endangering some of Europe's ecologically most valuable floodplains and green corridors. Danube floodplains in Croatia, Kopacki Rit. Photo: ©Mario Romulic, [www.romulic.com](http://www.romulic.com)*

### 3. CLIMATE CHANGE – MAINSTREAM ECOSYSTEM BASED ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION AND ESTABLISH ENVIRONMENTAL FLOW REGIME

Climate change is already heavily affecting Southern Europe but effects will be felt more keenly over large parts of Europe in the future. The EEB believes the following basic principles are essential to effectively fight climate change:

- Improve implementation of existing environmental legislation (e.g. WFD, Birds and Habitats Directives) to increase ecosystem resilience
- Take a holistic approach and integrate climate and environment aspects into wider land-use planning
- Mainstream ecosystem-based climate change adaptation and mitigation in all relevant policies

**The focus should be on holistic solutions, non-technical adaptation and prevention through adequate planning.** We need to reduce unsustainable water demand and stop increasing water demand where there is already little water left. Water need and supply should be re-defined in many places in Europe – based on social and ecological standards – as establishing water efficiency standards might not be enough if water use is already excessive.

#### **Spatial planning and Green Infrastructure:**

rural space use must be adapted according to existing and future water availability (**‘function follows water’**), so wasting water is replaced by more sustainable land use that conserves water resources. It is well documented by now, that integrated spatial measures often provide better solutions to climate change than technological ones. They increase the resilience of water bodies and aquatic ecosystems and contribute to rural development. They contribute to natural water purification and the adaptation of climate-sensitive species and ecosystems. Near urbanized areas, they offer new possibilities for recreation, improve the business climate, and therefore, the conditions for economic development. Some nature-based climate solutions have proven to be more cost-effective and more sustainable in the long run than traditional civil engineering<sup>2</sup>.



*Natural wetlands and floodplains enhance the resilience of ecosystems to climate change. Natural Wetlands: Bog in Lechtal, Tirol, and Wet Meadow in National Park Comana, Romania. Photos: ©Peter Lengyel.*

<sup>2</sup> Naturally Safe: climate buffers in practice. Working together on water defense systems. December 2011. Dutch Coalition Natural Climate Buffers, [www.klimaatbuffers.nl](http://www.klimaatbuffers.nl). Also: [www.ecoshape.org](http://www.ecoshape.org).





*Natural water retention measures can offer cost effective solutions for the mitigation of flood risks and offer economically valuable benefits. Dike relocation near Lenzen, Germany. Photo: ©Jochen Purps*

Developing guidance in the field of water and wetland management as a sectoral contribution to the **EU Green Infrastructure Strategy** is therefore very much needed. The new Green Infrastructure Strategy should include **binding EU-level targets on soil sealing to avoid increasing flood risk. Ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation should be mainstreamed in EU funding.** The Commission has to ensure that this guidance impacts the next cycle river basin management plans: 2016–2021.

It is of paramount importance that such strategies are efficiently financed through the EU Budget (especially the Cohesion Policy and CAP) as well as national funds. Furthermore, natural water safety and retention measures should be assessed as **standard compulsory alternatives** in the designing and administrative permit process. This should

be included during the **2012 review of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive.**

Member States and the European Commission should ensure that climate change **mitigation and adaptation measures that have a negative effect** on reaching the objectives of water and nature legislation and further decrease resilience of ecosystems (“wrong answers”) **are efficiently prevented.** In line with this, the EEB is against the establishment of a drought emergency fund as emergency funds are often spent in a manner not coherent with existing EU legislation.

The EEB supports the development of a Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) guidance to support the use of water accounting and Environmental flows at river basin level,



*Water pricing is essential. The absence of economic incentives fosters inefficiency and water wastage in agriculture. Most EU-member states heavily subsidize irrigation infrastructure such as dam construction – without consideration of the external costs imposed on society.*

*Photos: ©www.proplanta.de*

as well as the development of **binding efficiency targets**. Later on, when enough evidence is available, **WFD technical annexes or the daughter directive on Environmental flows** should be adopted. **Environmental flows definition and implementation** should not be restricted to water-stressed basins only, but made **compulsory everywhere**. It is important to consider **strategic groundwater reserves for drinking water supplies** and strategic economic instruments to switch to desalted water when necessary. This new legislation should ensure that existing water uses and rights are revised after targets and Environmental flows are set.

The EEB supports the introduction of **mandatory labelling and minimum water-efficiency requirements of water-using appliances, buildings and irrigation equipment**. We also support the development of a **Directive on water efficiency in buildings**.

Nevertheless, introducing effective pricing is the most important instrument to foster innovation and achieve technological change. Economic incentives trigger innovation (e.g. water saving appliances, toilets, washing machines, metering etc.) and foster the widespread use of such new technologies and services. Thus **the better use of economic instruments (tariffs, incentive pricing)** to achieve efficient sustainable water allocation should be strengthened. In severely water-stressed areas, a **compulsory drought insurance system** for farmers and other water-intensive industries should be established.



## 4. MAKE WATER ECONOMICS WORK BETTER



*The Polluter Pays Principle needs to be applied more strictly. Users of water resources need to pay a price for the damage they cause on rivers, lakes and aquifers. Infrastructure for water services such as dams entail massive environmental and resource costs.*

*Tignes dam, Les Brevières, France. Photo: ©Heidi Megerle 2007*

**Only the application of a broad definition of water services and the full application of effective water pricing** would alleviate European households' disproportionate contribution to Europe's water management. Member States have to apply economics in the second cycle of RBMPs much more effectively, and the Commission has to support them in their attempt.

In light of the pressures put on Europe's water resources – particularly through agriculture, energy production and navigation – it is paramount that both the EU and national governments **assess and revise harmful subsidies** in a number of policy fields. There is also a need to develop and introduce further economic instruments to reduce environmentally detrimental activities and to promote more

sustainable use of water resources. **Taxing environmental 'bads'** will reduce the risk of unintended subsidisation of environmentally harmful alternatives, as well as the need for public funding<sup>3</sup>.

Since 2011, the EU has developed the **European Semester**, which is a new mechanism for coordinating national economic reform efforts. Although not binding in nature, the European Semester can create a powerful support for the accelerated introduction of effective water-pricing instruments at Member State level. For instance, the 2011 Country Recommendation for Cyprus includes a point on water pricing. The future cycles of the European Semester should systematically make such recommendations to all EU Member States.

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<sup>3</sup>OECD (2008): An OECD Framework for Effective and Efficient Environmental Policies. Meeting of the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC) at Ministerial Level. Environment and Global Competitiveness. 28-29 April 2008.



*Benefits of living rivers and water ecosystems come for free, but they are nonetheless of great economic and social value. The EU should critically review ecologically harmful subsidies.*

*Photo: ©www.sxc.hu*

Through strict enforcement, the EU should ensure that **large budget cuts** introduced due to the economic crisis, **do not adversely affect adversely the implementation of nature and water legislation**, and that EU objectives are properly met despite the economic crisis.

Living rivers and lakes provide a wide array of important ecosystem services, which are of great economic value to society. So far, however, not nearly enough attention has been given to **estimating the improvement of socio-economic benefits, which would result from implementing the WFD**. Hence, these benefits are not widely known. A thorough cost-benefit analysis is often missing from RBMPs as well, which often creates the impression that WFD implementation is disproportionately costly. An assessment of the benefits of implementing RBMPs on national and European levels should be carried out.

Member States and the EU should devote more resources to communicating the socio-economic benefits of better water protection towards the general public. Furthermore, **improved cost-benefit analysis** should be a part of the second cycle of RBMPs and of any infrastructure or development project affecting water.



## 5. REFORM THE CAP TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE USE OF WATER IN AGRICULTURE

**Agricultural diffuse pollution** with nutrients and pesticides is a major problem in nearly all European river basins. **The cost of removing nutrients and pesticides from drinking water is passed onto the individual customer through the water bill, while farmers are asked to contribute little or nothing at all. Furthermore, irrigation for agriculture** often causes the over-abstraction of surface and ground waters, with disastrous ecological effects.

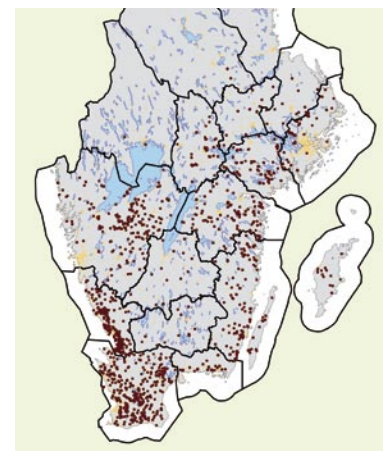
It is clear that only a **thorough reform of the CAP would provide a solution** to the above challenges. The CAP should stop subsidizing farming practices that contribute to surface and groundwater pollution and the depletion of scarce water resources. In times of budgetary pressures, we need to ensure that **public money supports public goods**. This has to start with the **inclusion of the Water Framework Directive** and the **Sustainable Use of Pesticide Directive in Cross Compliance**. In this framework,



*Eutrophication is one of the major environmental problems across the EU. Excess nutrients from agricultural runoff eventually end up in rivers, lakes and seas with drastic detrimental effects on water quality and ecological status. Satellite image of cyanobacterial bloom in the Baltic Sea in August 2010. Note also that the large Vistula and Curonian lagoons on the Southeastern coast are green as a meadow. Satellite image: ©European Space Agency – ESA*

CAP support should be made conditional on **water metering for farmers**.

Furthermore, to ensure that the CAP effectively supports those who farm sustainably and maintain high quality and quantity of water resources, the proposed **Pillar I greening** component has to be maintained and translated into a strong and compulsory package of good agronomic practices (crop rotation, 10% Ecological Focus Areas and maintenance of permanent pastures). Additionally, **Pillar II** needs to be **sufficiently funded** and there should be a minimum spending for agro-environmental measures.



*Distribution of constructed wetlands (red) in Southern Sweden. Map: ©DAWA 2010, Swedish Board of Agriculture.*

Wetlands are indispensable for nutrient reduction in Europe's river basins and seas. Wetlands have proven to be highly cost-effective in tackling agricultural pollution and provide a range of wider ecosystem benefits (climate mitigation, bio-diversity). Therefore the **maintenance of the Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition Standard (GAEC) 7 under the CAP on the protection on wetlands and carbon rich soils** is of high importance. The **CAP** should also **support the establishment of new wetlands** in the agricultural landscape through agro-environmental programs.

**Enlargement of irrigation areas shouldn't be supported by the CAP** in water-stressed areas, and only under specific circumstances in future water-stressed areas. The CAP should support the transition to a changing climate: the change of crops, production patterns and practices. This means solutions that are adapted to local ecological circumstances rather than costly technological solutions which will not work everywhere.

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) is a federation of over 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in most EU Member States, most candidate and potential candidate countries as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. EEB's aim is to protect and improve the environment by influencing EU policy, promoting sustainable development objectives and ensuring that Europe's citizens can play a part in achieving these goals. EEB stands for environmental justice and participatory democracy. Our office in Brussels was established in 1974 to provide a focal point for our members to monitor and respond to the EU's emerging environmental policy.



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