

Water

Water is essential for life on our planet



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Water

Water is essential for life on our planet. Our ecosystems, society and economy all need clean fresh water in sufficient amounts to thrive. But water resources are under increasing pressure in many parts of the world, and Europe is no exception. We must improve the way we use and manage our water resources if we are to continue to benefit from the vital services our water ecosystems provide.

We need clean, usable water every day: to drink, bathe in, cook, and produce many goods and services. Protecting water resources — and ensuring their ecological quality — is a cornerstone of EU environmental policy. Introduced in 2000, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC) was the first directive to take an integrated, ‘ecosystem-based approach’ to this task: protecting water ecosystems equally in terms of water quality, water quantity, and their role as habitats.

However, it is likely that almost half of Europe’s water bodies will miss the WFD target and still be in poor ecological status in 2015 (EEA report 08/2012). This is due to several causes.

The natural cycle of water availability is continually under threat from a variety of different pressures. These pressures expose freshwater ecosystems and societies to man-made shortages, pollution and excesses of water, a situation known as ‘vulnerability’. Land use, water abstraction and climate change are human-induced changes that alter the natural ‘flow regimes’ of water bodies.


Several sources also point to a frequent imbalance in Europe’s surface water (water in rivers and lakes) and groundwater (water in sub-surface aquifers). Water use often exceeds water availability, resulting in water stress across much of Europe (EEA report 11/2012).

Water ecosystems have many functions: filtering, diluting and storing freshwater; preventing floods; maintaining microclimatic balance; and safeguarding biodiversity. Protecting such multifunctional benefits requires a correspondingly broad outlook. It requires the integration of policies on climate change adaptation and biodiversity with sectoral policies such as those dealing with agriculture, energy and transport.

EU policies

Protecting Europe's common water resources and ecosystems from pollution, over-abstraction and structural changes requires concerted action at EU level.

The WFD provides a framework for water protection and management in the European Community (Directive 2000/60/EC). Under its implementation, Member States must first identify and analyse European waters, by individual river basin and district. They shall then adopt management plans and programmes of measures to protect water bodies in all European river basins. The adoption of the WFD was complemented by earlier EU water policies that are still in place, such as those concerning urban wastewater or bathing water.

In 2012, the Commission published the communication  **A Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources** (COM(2012)673). It focuses on policy actions that can help improve implementation of current water legislation, and on the integration of water policy objectives into other policies.

The Blueprint enhances water policies related to water quantity and water resource efficiency for sustainable water management in the timeframe of the EU's 2020 Strategy up to 2050. Besides the WFD and the Blueprint, four water directives contribute to measures ensuring the good status of Europe's waters (the **Urban Waste Water Directive** (91/271/EEC), the **Bathing Water Directive** (2006/7/EC), the **Nitrates Directive** (91/676/EEC) and the **Drinking Water Directive** (98/83/EC)). The **Floods Directive** (2007/60/EC), which aims to foster flood risk management plans, also significantly enhances the objectives of the WFD.

EEA activities

The European Environment Agency (EEA) supports the implementation and evaluation of existing and upcoming EU water policies. It contributes to a comprehensive knowledge base for policymaking that addresses the preservation, resilience and restoration of European waters. The EEA's extensive water information takes the form of reports, data, indicators, and assessments, all of which are accessible via the Water Data Centre.

The Water Information System for Europe (WISE) is a partnership between the European Commission (Directorate-General for Environment, Joint Research Centre and Eurostat) and the EEA. WISE is the most comprehensive multi-institutional entry point to water knowledge. The Water Data Centre, an important part of WISE, houses data and information collected by EU institutions to serve several stakeholders. Via WISE viewers and interactive maps, a wide range of information can be accessed and presented in its spatial context.

Throughout 2012, the EEA presented a series of reports to assess the state of European waters. These reports evaluated critical aspects of water for policymaking (e.g. resource efficiency and water economics, ecological and chemical status, hydro-morphology, vulnerability and biodiversity).

The EEA's mission is to provide timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information on water issues. This is supported by the European Topic Centre on Inland, Coastal and Marine waters (ETC/ICM).

Outlook

The EEA will continue to provide water information and assessments, with increasing focus on the ecosystem-based approach and an exploration of the role of water management in a green economy. Ecosystem assessments and water resource efficiency are key elements for future sustainable water management. WISE will continue to host the knowledge base needed to assess progress on Europe's path towards good status for all its water bodies.

Related links

- [European Commission - Water Policy](#)
- [The Water Information System for Europe \(WISE\)](#)
- [European Topic Centre on Inland, Coastal and Marine waters \(ETC/ICM\)](#)

- [Water Framework Directive Database](#)
- [International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River](#)
- [International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine](#)
- [European Water Partnership](#)

Related content

See also

[Water assessments for 2012 - European year of water](#)

[<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/water/water-assessments-2012>]

[The pan-European environment](#) [<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/regions/pan-european/pan-european-environment>]

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