



# EU Water Blueprint Conference

26 – 27 November 2012, Nicosia, Cyprus

## Key messages

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## About the Conference

The EU Water Blueprint Conference, which took place on 26-27 November 2012 in Nicosia, Cyprus, held a debate between different stakeholders, Member States, and the European Commission on the implementation of the policy proposals of the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources.

The detailed Conference report, the presentations and video footage of the speeches from the Conference are available at: <http://euwaterblueprintconference.eu>.

## General remarks

- The policy proposals of the Blueprint are wide ranging. The Blueprint, published by the European Commission, is the result of a collective effort involving consultation and preparative activities together with Member States, stakeholders, NGOs and the scientific community.
- There is a need to step up actions and carry out joint work at all levels in order to get closer to attaining the goal set by the Water Framework Directive (WFD) for good water status. At present we are a long way from reaching that goal as only 53% of EU surface waters are expected to be in good ecological status by 2015. The Blueprint options are not one size fits all and the aim is to help direct efforts and actions where they are most needed.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) showed an impressive improvement of knowledge, an increase in transparency and a larger inclusion of ecological perspectives into EU water management. Nonetheless, there are areas where further efforts are needed to improve implementation (e.g. monitoring, chemical status, hydromorphology, over-use, exemptions and analysis of the cost of water use). There is also a need to better define measures, and to this end, we need a better understanding of the cost of inaction and costs/benefits of selected measures, as well as a consistent planning process.
- More policy integration is needed, in particular in the agricultural field. This is critical and can only be achieved through greater coherence between water policy and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In this respect, the ongoing negotiations on the reform of the CAP are crucial.
- The EU legislative framework on water is comprehensive and there are only a few gaps left to fill, e.g. in relation to water re-use.



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## Land use and ecological status vulnerability

- Green infrastructures (e.g. wetlands, floodplains) are key measures to reduce the impacts of land use on water status and to decrease the vulnerability of the water ecosystem. A multi-stakeholder dialogue is key to increasing the uptake of green infrastructure needed for achieving WFD goals. Water managers should develop integrated water resource management plans in a way that ensures the protection of ecosystems so that other sectors, including funding schemes, can consider this in their planning.
- The promotion of strategic approaches for hydropower planning is necessary to assist authorities in taking decisions on best solutions and projects which are in the pipeline as well as for a better-informed and transparent application of WFD article 4.7 on new modifications of water bodies.
- Stronger policy harmonization and integration is needed between water, agricultural and energy policy. In addition, biodiversity policies can significantly contribute to reaching the goal of restoring European waters.
- To address pressures on ecological status, there is a need for more knowledge (e.g. on water accounting, needs of ecological flow and hydromorphological processes) and for reinforced tools on knowledge sharing between different stakeholders.
- The need for further knowledge should not be used as an argument to postpone the appropriate consideration of ecological flow. Member States need to work on ways to implement ecological flow together with stakeholders (particularly relevant in transboundary contexts) and to integrate it into the current policy framework. The definition of ecological flow has both an ecological and an economic dimension and should be a step-by-step process. In addition, it needs to be combined with an adaptive management strategy which periodically adjusts flow requirements.
- Using technologies such as satellite imagery is important to locate illegal abstractions. However, political will and subsequent adequate management is also needed to address this issue and technologies need to be complemented with other measures (e.g. awareness-raising, water demand management, product labeling systems, inclusion of abstraction permits in CAP cross-compliance).

## Tackling water pollution – Water infrastructure

- EU legislation to tackle water pollution is comprehensive. Future focus should be on improved implementation of water pollution related directives. The European Commission and the WFD Common Implementation Strategy process offer a platform



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for sharing relevant experience and best practices.

- Financing is needed to promote innovation and solutions that are less cost-intensive in the build-up and maintenance of infrastructure. Financing should come partly from the private sector/industry. The use of economic mechanisms such as pricing needs to be strengthened.
- Pollution prevention is to be preferred and end-of-pipe technologies should be the last resort for the removal of chemicals in water. However, it is clear that end-of-pipe technologies will continue to play an important role in the short and medium term.
- No single measure can address water related risks from pharmaceuticals. The EU, Member States and industry must act together to solve this problem in a complementary way.
- Water infrastructure faces several challenges including the maintenance of aging infrastructure, adaptation to climate change and the introduction of new pollutants. A way to finance water infrastructure in view of these challenges is the use of the 3 Ts approach (tariffs, taxes, transfers).
- Producing food with less impact on water resources could be achieved partly by water re-use in agriculture. Water re-use needs clear standards at the EU level to ensure confidence in the quality of re-used water and to enable the circulation of agricultural products in Europe's open market.

## **Economic instruments and planning tools to support higher water efficiency**

The right water price signals are essential to encouraging the uptake of water efficiency measures by economic agents:

- Political barriers are the main reason for the distortion of water prices. Better integration between different policy streams is needed. Subsidies, historic allocation rights, illegal abstraction, and lack of metering can result in misallocation of water resources among competing uses and the deterioration of ecological status.
- While water pricing policies need to account for equity concerns, ensuring an adequate degree of cost recovery of water services provision (including environmental and resource costs) is necessary in order to ensure the financial sustainability of water resource management and to achieve environmental and health objectives.
- In the area of agriculture, increased irrigation efficiency can be achieved with the right balance between incentives (subsidies), conditionality, farm advice, education and



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awareness-raising.

Accounting for water availability and demand is a key decision-making tool for water management:

- Water accounts, based on standard UN principles on environmental and economic accounting, need to take into consideration WFD ecological status requirements. It is necessary to first set-aside the water needed for the ecological flow and then use economic instruments to allocate the remaining water available in the system between other uses.
- However, knowledge on ecological flows and water availability at river basin scales is either insufficient or not adequately integrated into decision making. It is therefore essential to further share results from research, monitoring, reporting and assessment, at local, national and EU levels, in order to inform the development of quantity and quality accounts at the river basin level.

## Global aspects of EU water policy

- A water-energy-food security nexus perspective helps identify interdependencies and find interdisciplinary solutions. The nexus is about the way different goals are interconnected and about enabling cooperation between the water sector and other sectors.
- The water sector needs to get more involved in the climate change discussion. The impact on water resources should be better integrated in climate change mitigation strategies (e.g. impact of EU biofuel objectives on water management).
- Development policy needs to address the setting and enforcement of standards, and ensure a good water governance structure supported by adequate technology. In addition, the issue of corruption is crucial for water management in development policy.
- It needs to be clarified how the European Commission intends to proceed with the EU Water Initiative, which can be used as a platform to work on the above nexus, to accelerate cooperation with the private sector and to address security issues related to water.
- The EU should be a credible strategic partner on water issues for developing countries. Land grabbing is an issue of global concern, which also implies water grabbing and endangers subsistence agriculture.
- Sanitation is a problem for which a solution needs to be accelerated. Even within the





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EU, there are sanitation issues that still need to be addressed via the full implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

## Crosscutting solutions

- Stakeholders support the Blueprint proposals to streamline reporting cycles and data collection arrangements under EU water policy. There is a need to focus data collection on what is important and necessary for policy implementation, in order to be efficient and reduce data costs for Member States.
- By the next WFD reporting cycle, the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) should be enhanced to make information better accessible and improve the collection of certain types of data, e.g. on economic analysis. In order to improve WISE, it is necessary to clearly define its purpose and the target groups to whom it is most useful.
- Scientific information from EU-funded research has already been largely used to support the activities of the WFD Common Implementation Strategy. There is a need to further improve knowledge transfer and uptake by river basin authorities and implementers.
- Stakeholders expressed support for the Blueprint proposal to set up a voluntary peer review system of draft RBMPs by River Basin District authorities. Exchange between Member States is valued and information and experiences should be more intensively shared between lower levels of administration (e.g. at the river basin level).
- It is important to ensure effective public participation in the implementation of EU water policy and to ensure that stakeholders are involved from the beginning of the RBMP development process. Public participation is also key as an integrating process in promoting cooperation with other sectors at both the EU and local levels.
- On the introduction of specific requirements from the WFD in the CAP cross-compliance, some stakeholders supported the inclusion of key legal measures, e.g. on abstraction permits and water pricing. Other stakeholders argued that pillar I of the CAP should be very simple at the Member State level and may only lead to relatively modest environmental benefits. Concerning pillar II, several stakeholders emphasised its importance in stimulating farmer behaviour in specific areas and the need to further strengthen this pillar in terms of budget and legal framework. However, others suggested that pillar II has a lower impact than pillar I and needs to be accompanied by certain binding requirements.
- Overall, there is a need to combine both mandatory and voluntary measures for the



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agricultural sector and use a differentiated approach based on the problems and needs of each river basin.