

Joint statement on the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive

We, the undersigned non-profit association, businesses and business associations, call upon all EU Member States, Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission to adopt an ambitious recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive that sets the EU on track to limit water pollution from urban sources, while reducing energy consumption and emissions of greenhouse gases.

Clean, sufficient and healthy waters are fundamental for ecosystems, society and for businesses, and a vital common resource that we need to protect for everyone. Substantial improvements will require engagement from wider stakeholders beyond municipalities.

The 1991 Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) has helped in reducing pollution from urban sources and improved water quality across the Union¹, but remaining pollution and climate change are putting increasing pressure on our natural systems and society as both prolonged droughts and intense rain events become more frequent. Moreover, current treatment does not sufficiently remove micropollutants, such as pharmaceutical residues. Discharges of untreated, insufficiently or inappropriately treated wastewaters in the environment remains one of the main reasons why the EU is failing to achieve good environmental status, including good chemical status, under the Water Framework Directive.²

Integrated urban wastewater management is key in cities' adaptation to climate change. Preventive action, such as increased green space, deliver multiple benefits by reducing pollution from sewage spills while making cities more attractive and liveable, including protection from flooding and heat waves. Wastewater contains substantial potential for generating renewable energy, including waste heat, which could actively contribute to decarbonize the heating sector. At the same time, many technological advances, including in energy efficiency, green infrastructure solutions, and sector integration via excess heat recovery and use, have not yet been mainstreamed and wastewater collection and treatment remain unnecessarily inefficient. More wastewater could be treated with significantly less resources.

The current update offers a chance to modernize the 30-year-old EU wastewater rules to address the challenges of today and for the next few decades. This modernisation is key to limiting the urban impacts on the environment and human health, to developing aquaculture production, including organic aquaculture, and recreational activities, and to protecting drinking water. The Directive's update offers significant opportunities for the economy, ranging from world-leading innovation in water technology and smart tools, and generally for all activities that are highly dependent on high water quality.

Despite its importance for safeguarding human, animal and environmental health, the water sector is heavily underinvested³, and while initial costs may locally be significant, the benefits far outweigh the costs. New challenges, however, such as installation of advanced treatment to remove micropollutants, will further increase the need for funding, and it is essential that also the actors placing products on the market contribute to the treatment costs.

We call on the co-legislators to agree on an ambitious Directive that constitutes a roadmap for the decades to come, to help achieve good ecological and chemical status of water bodies, including transitional and coastal waters.

In particular, we call for:

¹ European Commission, SWD(2022) 541 final, Impact Assessment: Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast),

https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-revised-urban-wastewater-treatment-directive_en

² European Environmental Agency, EEA Report No 7/2018, European Waters: Assessment of status and pressures 2018 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-water>

³ OECD, Financing Water Supply, Sanitation and Flood Protection: Challenges in EU Member States and Policy Options <https://doi.org/10.1787/6893cdac-en>

- Ensuring coherent rules across the EU without exemptions for selected Member States or regions, avoiding further delays for coastal regions;
- Maintaining 100,000 p.e. as the threshold for intermediary targets for tertiary and quaternary treatment and ensure that quaternary treatment is installed by 2035;
- Ensuring a timely introduction of integrated urban wastewater management plans that prioritise green and blue infrastructure to climate-proof cities and reduce pollution from urban wastewaters and runoffs;
- Setting up an obligation to communicate in real time any information on the risk of pollution that could have an impact on aquaculture farmers, drinking water suppliers and other legitimate users;
- Establish an obligation to make publicly available the Integrated Urban Wastewater Management Plans and the results of the risk assessments;
- A return to the Commission's proposal (as amended by the EP and Council) that the wastewater sector produces renewable energy on or offsite, to be consumed on or offsite that cover by 2040 100% of this sector's energy consumption, to ensure that the EU reaches climate-neutrality by 2050;
- The new Directive must be a signal and a tool to implement the circular economy for water, energy and materials throughout EU territories.

Signatories

EU/international

Xylem

Veolia

Suez

European Alliance to Save Energy (EU-ASE)

World Green Infrastructure Network (WGIN)

European Federation of Green Roof Associations (EFB)

European Fishing Tackle and Trade Association (EFTTA)

Danfoss

Euroheat and Power

Optigrün international

Sempergreen

Ragn-Sells

European Biogas Association

European Water Association (EWA)

Natural Mineral Waters Europe

National

CNC - Comité National de la Conchyliculture

Association française des toitures et façades végétales

Associação Nacional de Coberturas Verdes

The German Association of Building Greening (BuGG)



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Creating an Energy-Efficient Europe

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