

EU WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE: PURPOSE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

1 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD)

The purpose of the WFD is to establish a framework for the protection of surface waters (including rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters) and ground waters throughout the EU territory. The main environmental objectives are to achieve and maintain good status for all surface waters and ground waters by the target date of 2015, and to prevent deterioration and ensure the conservation of high water quality where it still exists. This is to be accomplished by implementing the measures necessary to

- prevent deterioration of the status of waters,
- protect, enhance and restore all bodies of surface waters and ground waters.
- promote sustainable water use (through effective pricing of water services),
- progressively reduce discharges of priority substances and cease or phase discharges of priority hazardous substances for surface waters,
- ensure progressive reduction of pollution of groundwater,
- mitigate the effects of floods and droughts,
- ensure sufficient supply of water,
- protect the marine environment.

The achievement of the above will ensure a wide range of adequate uses of water resources (drinking water, irrigation, industrial use etc.), which will in turn form an essential foundation for a region's future economic prosperity and social cohesion.

By establishing a coherent managerial frame for all water related legislation, the WFD aims for consistency in planning and measures basing water management on river basins.

The river basin management established under the WFD begins with an analysis of the characteristics of the river basin district, a review of the impact of human activity on water status, and an economic analysis of water use. A registry must be compiled of those areas in each river basin designated for special protection under Community legislation. Programmes to monitor water status must be established, along with programmes of measures for each river basin district in order to achieve the specified environmental objectives. Then, for each river basin district, a river basin management plan setting forth the above elements must be produced with the active involvement of all interested parties. Finally, the specific programmes of measures must be implemented so as to achieve the objective of good status for all waters within each river basin.

Implementation of the Water Framework Directive raises a number of shared technical challenges for the Member States and other stakeholders. In addition, since many European river basins are international, crossing administrative and territorial borders, a common understanding and approach is crucial to successful and effective implementation of the WFD goals.

In 2001, to assist Member States to address these challenges in a co-operative and co-ordinated way, the Commission developed a Common Implementation Strategy (CIS). Key

activities under this strategy include information sharing, developing guidance on technical issues, information and data management, and application, testing and validation.

Year	Timetable for Implementing the Water Framework Directive
2000	WFD comes into force
2001	Common Implementation Strategy published
2003	Transposition into national legislation Designation of river basin districts and competent authorities
2004	For each river basin: - Analysis of the natural characteristics, pressures and human impacts - Economic analysis of water use - Register of areas needing special protection
2006	Operational water monitoring programmes
2008	Public consultation on proposed river basin management plans
2009	River basin management plans with programmes of measures finalised
2009-15	Implementation of programmes of measures
2010	Water pricing policies in place to promote sustainable use of water
2015	Achievement of good status for all surface waters and ground waters

The WFD requires Member States to promote sustainable use of water by using economic instruments. They must take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services, including environmental and resource costs, and in accordance with the polluter pays principle. An economic analysis must be carried out for each river basin and, on the basis of that analysis, water pricing policies established that provide adequate incentives for efficient use of water and that ensure adequate contribution of different water uses (household, industrial, agricultural) to recovery of costs for water services.

2 COMMON IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

In May 2001, the Member States, Norway and the European Commission agreed to launch a joint informal implementation process called the Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive. The strategy has the objectives to develop a common understanding, share experiences, create synergies and networks for a successful implementation.

The implementation process was set up in an open and transparent way by involving stakeholders, environmental NGOs and the scientific community at every stage of its development. Particular emphasis was given to involving the Candidate Countries as equal partners in the process. Currently, more than 800 experts on water management around Europe contribute to the Common Implementation Strategy's Work Programme.

During the initial phase, the focus of the strategy was on the preparation of informal guidance documents for implementation. 13 guidance documents on issues including, e.g. economic analysis, monitoring or public participation were completed to date. The current phase is

concentrated on testing the application of those guidance documents in 15 pilot river basins in 18 countries, with the aim of identifying “best practices” in integrated river basin management.

3 NEXT STEPS

As the next milestone in the Directive, Member States will have to designate the river basin districts and their river basin authorities by 22 June 2004. Currently, the Commission estimates that, for EU25, approximately 120 river basin districts will be formed. Of these districts approximately one third (by numbers) and approximately two third (by surface area) will be transboundary river basin districts including the two largest basins partially shared by EU countries, the Danube (~800.000 km²) and the Rhine (~230.000 km²). With the enlargement, transboundary river basins will be bordering the EU with all our neighbours, including the Candidate Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Balkan States, Turkey, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Russia. Since the Directive promotes integrated management for entire river basin districts, the impact of the Directive will go far beyond the border of the EU.

Thereafter as mentioned before, a first characterisation of water bodies (following technical requirements described in annexes to the directive) and an analysis of anthropogenic pressures, impacts and uses is due in March 2005 to make a first evaluation of the risks that water bodies would fail to meet the directive’s environmental objectives. The monitoring programmes will follow this characterisation phase and be established by 2006. The final goal is to finalise a river basin management plan including a programme of measures by the end of 2009. This plan shall ensure that the objectives of the Directive are met in 2015.

In addition, the Commission was required to come forward with specific legislation regulating in more detail the general requirements of the Water Framework Directive in relation to groundwaters and pollution from priority substances. In September, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Groundwater Directive which is now undergoing co-decision. The proposals on quality standards and emission controls for priority substances are expected in mid-2004.

Once adopted, these policies will further strengthen the protection of our European waters.

4 THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE: AN EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE

Many of the new elements introduced by the WFD may usefully be transferred elsewhere:

- **Linkages to the ecosystems-oriented approach**
 - “**Combined approach**” of emission limit values and quality standards, plus phasing out hazardous substances
 - **Integrated Water Resources Management and River Basin Management; and transboundary co-operation:** in the case of international river basins, Member States shall co-ordinate efforts in order to produce a single river basin management plan. This also applies to countries lying outside the EU thereby extending the impact of the Directive, in particular, towards Eastern and Central Europe.
 - **Involvement of all stakeholders (mandatory participation of citizens, stakeholders and NGOs) as well as neighbouring countries**
 - **Economic instruments supporting environmental objectives**
 - **Streamlining of legislation** - integration of all water-related EU legislation into a coherent managerial frame
- Equally innovative is the **Common Implementation Strategy (CIS)** of the WFD agreed upon in 2001 by Member States, Norway and the European Commission, with

a view to harmonising and facilitating the implementation process. The CIS also involves new Member States, Candidate Countries, Stakeholders, Environmental NGOs and experts on water issues. The joint activities ensure the early involvement of all concerned partners and promote the development of “best practices” and “benchmarks” for the implementation. The CIS is based on four strands:

- Activities on information sharing and raising awareness,
- Developing guidance documents
- Establishing of information management system
- Integrated testing in pilot river basins

5 MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Water Framework Directive, the Common Implementation Strategy and EU water policy visit:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

Guidance documents for the implementation and many other useful documentation is available on the “Information Exchange Platform” of the Water Framework Directive at the following web-site:

<http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/env/wfd/library>