

How to understand the EU Water Framework Directive and how it can help to improve the environment



TRANSITION
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Table of Contents

1. Foreword — 2

2. Definitions and principles — 3

Water bodies — 3

Natural/Heavily Modified/Artificial Water bodies — 3

Status of water bodies — 4

Main goal of the Directive — 4

Pressures and threats — 5

Indicators — 5

Water pricing and the ‘Polluter Pays’ principle — 6

3. Implementation — 7

Integrated river basin management (IRBM) — 8

Most common challenges for WFD objectives — 8

Integration of WFD goals

 into other policies and sectors — 10

Key steps in the implementation

 of the Water Framework Directive — 10

River Basin Management Plans

 and Programmes of Measures — 11

What kinds of measures can be implemented? — 12

BOX 1: River restoration — 13

BOX 2: Fish ladders and passes — 14

BOX 3: Assisted spontaneous restoration — 15

Public participation — 16

Monitoring and reporting — 17

BOX 4: River partnership in Luxembourg — 18

4. Integration of the objectives of the WFD into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) — 21

BOX 5: Project WAgriCo — 23

5. Financing of preparatory works in the pre-accession period — 24

Five principles of how to use the opportunities presented by the Water Framework Directive for healthier rivers — 24

6. Selection of resources and useful links — 25

**How to understand
the EU Water Framework Directive
and how it can help
to improve the environment**

Prague, Chisinau 2020

Authors: Vlastimil Karlík, Martin Skalský

Proofreading: Simon Gill

Graphic design: Tereza Pavelková

Cover photo: Petr Zewlakk Vrabec

Language versions: English, Russian, Romanian

ISBN: 978-80-87651-84-1



This publication was prepared with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic within the framework of the Transition Promotion Programme – a financial assistance programme supporting democracy and human rights using the Czech Republic’s experience with social transition and democratization.

1. Foreword

The Water Framework Directive of the European Union came into effect in 2000. It is one of the most ambitious pieces of EU legislation, creating a coherent legislative and policy framework for all water-related issues, with the ultimate goal being to achieve a high level of ecological quality of all European water sources by 2027.

It has already brought significant improvements in water quality and aquatic ecosystems throughout the territory of Europe. But most importantly, it is slowly changing the whole water management paradigm, promoting a holistic and integrated approach focused on whole river basins and subbasins.

In the Czech Republic, we have seen a fast and significant decrease in the concentration of many pollutants in our rivers. Even if it was partly because of the decline of the most polluting industries, the Water Framework Directive gave us incentives, a methodology, and examples of good practices to make this change quickly and effectively. Also, we should not omit the importance of the monitoring network which the implementation of the Water Framework Directive

demands. In the first financial period after accession (2004–2006), huge investments were made with the support of EU funds to build and modernize wastewater treatment facilities, so nowadays every community with over 2000 inhabitants is connected to one.

In subsequent financial periods, schemes that also financed more nature-based measures were created and used for river and wetland restoration projects. Even if these projects were mostly small-scale, they provided good examples and are becoming increasingly popular among the general public, which at first had some reservations. However, recently, two restoration projects have been implemented on big rivers (the Morava and Dyje), which will, it is to be hoped, start a new trend of the comprehensive improvement of freshwater ecosystems in our country.

In my opinion, experience and some of the main principles of the Water Framework Directive can also become an inspiration for countries outside the EU. Especially for those countries that have signed Association Agreements with the EU, the protection of their waters should be on a priority list. For nature as well as society, water sources are of vital significance and the importance of their protection and sustainable use will only grow with the incoming impacts of climate change.

2. Definitions and principles

Water bodies

The basic unit for monitoring and planning. It should be defined as a coherent part of a river basin, allowing the water authority to define its ecological status unequivocally. There are surface water bodies – rivers, lakes, and coastal and transitional waters – and groundwater bodies.

TIPS AND TRICKS:

The definition of a water body can differ according to local conditions, but it should always be a coherent, homogeneous unit with clear geographical and hydrological borders. Remember that you will have a common definition of status and set of environmental objectives for the whole water body, so it is not a good idea to combine in one water body parts with different characteristics; then it would be extremely difficult to fulfil the general objectives of not letting it deteriorate and improving it. On the other hand, a very high number of water bodies could cause an unnecessary administrative burden.

Natural / Heavily Modified / Artificial Water bodies

If human influence has substantially changed the physical character of water bodies in terms of their morphology or hydrology, they can be described as heavily modified, with less stringent goals to achieve. These changes must be substantial and long-term. Similarly, these less stringent goals also apply to artificial water bodies.

Heavily modified water bodies are considered to be water bodies with a specific use (e.g. navigation, flood protection, land drainage, as reservoirs for drinking water, or for power generation or irrigation), which led to significant hydromorphological changes, and these changes cannot be remedied without preventing the continuation of the specified use.

TIPS AND TRICKS:

If you want to designate a water body as heavily modified, you must consider the following questions:

- a) would the restoration measures necessary to achieve good ecological status really have a significant adverse effect on the activity (use)?
- b) is it not possible to fulfil the purpose of the activity (use) by any other means?

If the answer to either of these questions is 'no', then the water body should not be designated as heavily modified, and restoration measures should be applied instead.

Status of water bodies

The status of water bodies is based on a comparison with the characteristics of natural water bodies.

As for surface water, ecological and chemical status has to be established, and the total status of the water body is the poorer of these two. Similarly, in the case of groundwater bodies, the status is the poorer one from their chemical and quantitative status.

Ecological status is assessed by a set of biological, physical, chemical, and hydromorphological indicators.

The assessment of chemical status is based on concentrations of what are called priority substances.

Quantitative status describes the balance between direct and indirect intakes and outtakes.

The status is described in five levels: high, good, moderate, poor, and bad.

In the case of artificial and heavily modified water bodies, we talk about "ecological potential" instead of "ecological status". Ecological potential has only four levels: good, moderate, poor, and bad.

TIPS AND TRICKS:

There has been great effort and success in developing robust and comparable methods for the assessment of ecological status across EU member states. This work has been supported through a comprehensive cross-comparison of status class boundaries, known as 'intercalibration'. The intercalibrated methods allow extensive, comparable, and robust assessments of the ecological status of Europe's waters and are considered to be one of the greatest strengths of the WFD.

Main goal of the Directive

The main goal of the Water Framework Directive is to achieve at least good status of all water bodies by the end of 2015. If some water bodies cannot achieve good status because of significant technical or economic reasons, there are two other six-year periods during which member states can ask for exceptions

in order to achieve the goal later. Anyway, by the end of 2027, all water bodies should, without exception, be in at least a good state. At the same time, member states must protect the status of all water bodies against any deterioration.

Pressures and threats

The starting point for achieving a good status of water bodies is the analysis of the pressures and threats which have been causing the deterioration of water bodies in the first place. The indicators mentioned below are just a tool, whether or not you achieved the goal, but measures should be tailored to eliminating the pressures and threats. It is like a healing process; you should heal the cause of the disease, not just its symptoms.

Indicators

Indicators are the tools developed to assess the status of water bodies.

Ecological status:

For ecological status, three sets of indicators are developed on the basis of the type of water body:

- biological indicators, such as the composition, abundance, and mass of water flora and fauna;

- hydromorphological characteristics, such as variation of width and depth, quantity and dynamics of water flow, structure and substrate of bed and banks;
- chemical and physical indicators important for biological elements, such as thermal and oxygenation conditions, salinity, acidification status, nutrient status, and specific pollutants.

Chemical status indicators are based on the concentrations of the main pollutants, with special stress put on priority substances, such as plant protection products, biocides, metals, and other groups such as Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH), which are mainly incineration by-products, and Polybrominated Biphenylethers (PBDE), which are used as flame retardants.

Groundwater should not be polluted at all – any pollution must be detected and stopped.

Quantitative status:

Member States must use geological data to identify distinct volumes of water in underground aquifers and limit abstraction to a portion of the annual recharge.

Water pricing and the 'Polluter Pays' principle

Article 9 of the WFD requires the implementation of pricing policies that provide an incentive to use water efficiently. Pricing is a powerful awareness-raising tool for consumers and combines environmental benefits with economic ones while stimulating innovation. Metering is a pre-condition for any incentive pricing policy. Article 9 also requires cost recovery (including environmental and resource costs) for water services, taking into account the 'polluter pays' principle.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Water pricing can contribute to changes in consumers' behaviour, especially if accompanied by support and promotion of water-saving devices and technologies. Still, it could be a difficult task considering that consumers – households as well as industries – could consider it a threat to their financial wellness. The mental connection involving a price increase immediately following a decrease in consumption is especially dangerous; this could be really discouraging for consumers.

3. Implementation

The key word for the successful implementation of the Water Framework Directive is “integration”. Different aspects of this integration can be described as follows:

1. integration of environmental objectives, combining quality, ecological, and quantity objectives for protecting highly valuable aquatic ecosystems and ensuring a general good status of other waters;
2. integration of all water resources, combining fresh surface water and groundwater bodies, wetlands, and coastal water resources on the river basin scale;
3. integration of all water uses, functions, and values into a common policy framework, i.e. investigating water for the environment, water for health and human consumption, water for economic sectors, transport, and leisure, and water as a social good;
4. integration of disciplines, analyses, and expertise, combining hydrology, hydraulics, ecology, chemistry, soil sciences, technology engineering, and economics to assess current pressures and impacts on water

resources and identify measures for achieving the environmental objectives of the Directive in the most cost-effective manner;

5. integration of water legislation into a common and coherent framework. The requirements of some old water legislation (e.g. the Fish water Directive) have been reformulated in the Water Framework Directive to reflect modern ecological thinking. After a transitional period, these old Directives will be repealed. Other pieces of legislation (e.g. the Nitrates Directive and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive) must be coordinated in river basin management plans, where they form the basis of the programmes of measures;
6. integration of all significant management and ecological aspects relevant to sustainable river basin planning, including those which are beyond the scope of the Water Framework Directive, such as flood protection and prevention;
7. integration of a wide range of measures, including pricing and other economic and financial instruments, into a common management approach for achieving the environmental objectives of the Directive. Programmes of measures are defined in River Basin Management Plans developed for each river basin district;

8. integration of stakeholders and the civil society in decision making, by promoting transparency and information to the public, and by offering an unique opportunity for involving stakeholders in the development of river basin management plans;
9. integration of different decision-making levels that influence water resources and water status, whether local, regional, or national, for the effective management of all waters;
10. integration of water management from different Member States, for river basins shared by several countries which are existing and/or future Member States of the European Union.

Integrated river basin management (IRBM)

The definition of IRBM is:

Integrated river basin management adopts a holistic approach to protecting the whole body of water, its source, tributaries, and the river mouth. The river basin approach is the best way to manage water. Of course, the status of the watercourse is interdependent with the status of the floodplain. Measures to achieve good status have to deal with point and diffuse sources of pollution, water and water-related habitats,

hydromorphology, land use changes, etc., etc. The river basin approach must be coordinated with the national framework for the management of water resources, where other national sectoral policies and priorities concerning the use of water resources are taken into consideration.

If a river basin includes the territory of more than one country, international cooperation between the relevant authorities is necessary to prepare a common river basin management plan, regardless of whether all of these belong to the EU.

Most common challenges for WFD objectives

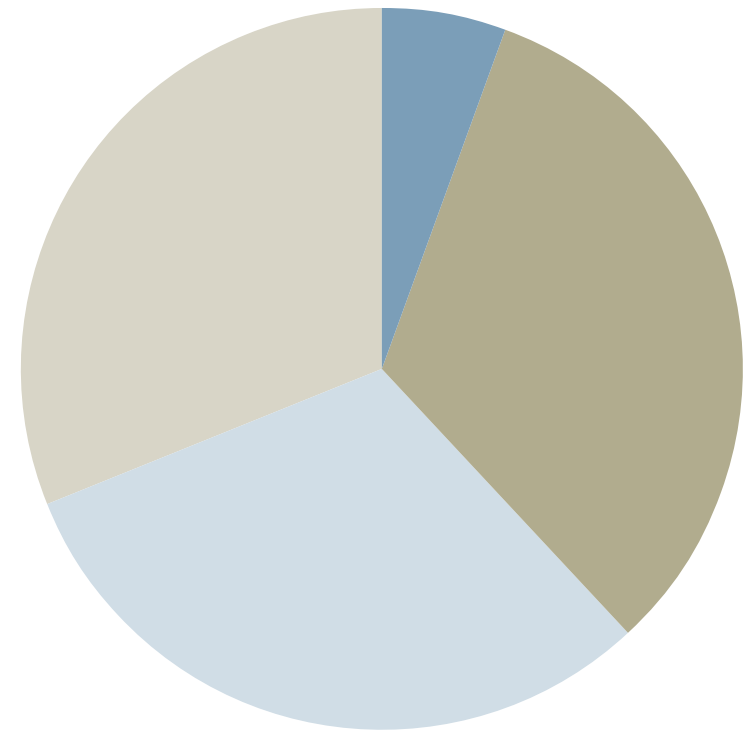
Generally, levels of pollution continue to become lower in EU member states (but still represent an obstacle to achieving the goals of WFD, especially in the case of diffuse sources from agriculture and atmospheric deposition of certain pollutants).

The most widespread source of pressure on ecological status in the EU originates from changes to water bodies resulting from, for example, dams for hydropower and navigation or draining land for agriculture or building embankments for flood protection.

The second most common source of pressure on EU ecological status stems from the over-abstraction of water. Over-allocating water to users in a river basin because of an overestimation of the amounts available, or because of economic or political pressure, should be distinguished from water abstraction which is illegal because it is conducted without a permit or in breach of a given permit.

According to the EEA assessment published in 2018, the main significant pressures on surface water bodies are hydromorphological pressures (40%), diffuse sources (38%), particularly from agriculture, and atmospheric deposition (38%), particularly of mercury, followed by point sources (18%) and water abstraction (7%).

New problems are being caused by the development of the climate crisis. It can deepen problems of water scarcity and drought and thus increase the pressure to over-abtract and change flow patterns and water temperature, which can both contribute to loss of habitats and reduce the populations of animal and plant species.



WHY GOOD STATUS WAS NOT ACHIEVED

- HM pressures
- Diffuse sources
- Atmosphere depositors
- Abstractions

Integration of WFD goals into other policies and sectors

As we can see, to overcome most of the challenges, the integration of the WFD goals into other sectoral policies and practices is necessary. It is especially true for agriculture, forestry, fishery, energy and transport, land use planning, environmental impact assessment, and pollution-producing industries. It is also important to use potential synergies with the nature conservation strategies, especially the establishment of the Natura 2000 network. A special chapter in this brochure will be dedicated to the integration of the WFD into the Common Agricultural Policy.

Key steps in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive

- ✓ to identify the individual river basins lying within a country's national territory, assign them to individual river basin districts, and identify competent authorities;
- ✓ to characterize River Basin Districts in terms of the status quo, pressures, impacts, and economics of water use and produce a register of protected areas;
- ✓ to identify and characterize water bodies and define whether they are natural, artificial, or heavily modified;

- ✓ to carry out, jointly and together with the European Commission, the intercalibration of the ecological status classification systems;
- ✓ to establish monitoring networks, to monitor and analyse the river basin's characteristics in order to identify a programme of cost-effective measures to achieve the WFD's environmental objectives;
- ✓ for subsequent planning periods, to define significant water management issues to be addressed by subsequent River Basin Management plans;
- ✓ to produce and publish River Basin Management Plans, including programmes of measures;
- ✓ to implement water pricing policies that enhance the sustainability of water resources;
- ✓ to put programmes of measures into operation, to implement these measures and achieve the environmental objectives;
- ✓ to evaluate results and prepare River Basin Management Plans for the subsequent period.

River Basin Management Plans and Programmes of Measures

Each RBMP must apply to a “river basin district” (an area of land made up of a part of, one, or more neighbouring river basins). The river basin planning process involves setting environmental objectives for all groundwater and surface waters within the river basin district, and devising programmes of measures to meet those objectives.

River basin planning is a continuing process. In each period, it is necessary to identify objectives for water bodies and protected areas, consider possible measures to meet those objectives, and consider the technical feasibility, costs, and benefits of implementing those measures. On the basis of the result of this analysis, it could be necessary to reassess the objectives and consider the use of alternative objectives for the relevant period.

The river basin management plans should contain the following information:

- description and analysis of the river basin district, including, among others, natural and socio-economic characteristics, land use, identification and character of water bodies (natural, heavily modified, artificial), and a register of protected areas;

- description and analysis of the use of water resources and anthropogenic impacts on the status of waters in river basin districts, including e.g. identification and analysis of the impact of sources of pollution and abstraction of water, in terms of both the current situation and expected future trends;
- description and analysis of the monitoring network and evaluation; analysis of the status of water bodies and protected areas;
- definition of objectives for water bodies and protected areas, which are necessary to achieve good status and to prevent the deterioration of water bodies. Objectives should also be connected to the identification of significant water issues, analysis of impacts, and evaluation of current status of water bodies. In subsequent RBMPs, this section should also evaluate whether the objectives from previous RBMPs were achieved (or why not) and how realistic the achievement of good status in the planning period is;
- characteristics of the river basin district and objectives for management of the risks of floods and droughts;
- a programme of measures to achieve the objectives defined in the previous chapters;
- an economic analysis, including the definition of payments and cost-benefit analysis; analysis of the implementation of cost recovery and “polluter pays” principles.

What kinds of measures can be implemented?

Measures can include state-wide administrative or legislative acts, as well as concrete localized measures. Some of the typical measures include:

- fish ladders and bypasses, installation of fish-friendly turbines
- reconnecting arm branches
- restoration of the riverbed, wetland and/or floodplain, improvement of habitats
- changes in dam construction and operation
- ecological maintenance practices – management of sediment and vegetation, support for spontaneous river rehabilitation processes
- installation and modernization of water treatment facilities
- emission limits for industrial endeavours;
- administrative and legislative acts and/or funding schemes for changes to agricultural practices, including bans on specific substances;
- measures addressed at managing water demand, including the promotion of adaptation of agricultural production such as low-water crops in areas susceptible to drought;
- measures aimed at controlling diffuse emissions, such as the injection of manure into the soil rather than surface application;
- efficiency and reuse measures, including water-saving irrigation techniques or the reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation;
- establishment of protected areas and buffer zones;
- removal of landfills, cleaning of contaminated areas.

BOX 1



River restoration

River restoration projects can be found throughout the whole of Europe. They can achieve good ecological status by changing hydromorphology, restoring habitats, and renewing the natural dynamics of river and floodplain developments.

One of the early examples can be the restoration of the River Isara in Germany. About 8 km of river were restored to their original form of a braided river with a natural regime of flow and level changes. The results of the project were improved water quality and improvement of the ecological functions, including migration conditions, better flood protection, and benefits for the inhabitants – recreation and relaxation.

BOX 2



Fish ladders and passes

There are different reasons and different ways in which fish (and some other water animal) species migrate. But dams and weirs represent obstacles for all of them. Different methodologies and construction patterns have been developed to reduce the negative impact of these constructions.

↑ **Ideal design of a fish pass**
Stony Stratford, River
Great Ouse, United Kingdom

→ **Fish ladder at Lopwell dam**
River Tavy, United Kingdom



BOX 3

Assisted spontaneous restoration

Many rivers have the capacity to restore themselves naturally. In some cases, however, it is necessary to initiate this process by human intervention, e.g. by removing embankments or other artificial structures.



**Assisted restoration
of the River Morava**
near Štěpánov, Czech Republic

Public participation

Stakeholder engagement and involvement in water management is one of the main themes of the WFD. Ensuring and enabling this participation and influence should be an integral part of the river basin planning process. The Water Framework Directive specifically requires public consultations during the following steps of the planning process:

A) For the first planning period:

- 1.** Framework (Identification of River Basin Districts, Assignment of the Competent Authorities, Transposition of the Directive into national legislation);
- 2.** Characterization and Analysis (characterization of the river basin district, review of the environmental impact of human activity and economic analysis of water use; assessment of the likelihood that surface water bodies within the river basin district will fail to meet the environmental quality objectives – ‘gap analysis’);
- 3.** Planning for establishing programmes of measures and outline river basin management plans (further characterization for those bodies identified by the gap analysis as being at risk, in order to optimize

the monitoring programme and the programme of measures, monitoring programmes start);

- 4.** Summary of significant water management issues for each river basin district (at least six months for comments on this document);
- 5.** Drafts of River Basin Management Plans, including Programmes of Measures (at least six months for comments on this document)

B) For the subsequent planning periods:

- 1.** Summary of significant water management issues for each river basin district: the summary must be published two years before the start of the next planning period and there are six months for public consultations;
- 2.** Drafts of River Basin Managements Plans, including Programmes of Measures: must be published one year before the start of the planning period and there are again six months for public consultations.

TIPS AND TRICKS

There are several examples of encouraging public participation in the planning process above and beyond the requirements of the directive. One of them could be the “river partnership” scheme developed in Luxembourg – see box 4.

Monitoring and reporting

Article 8 of the Directive establishes the requirements for the monitoring of surface water status, groundwater status, and protected areas. Monitoring programmes are required to establish a coherent and comprehensive overview of the water status within each river basin district.

Fulfilment of the monitoring obligations under the WFD is fundamental to support robust decision making, especially since the cost of monitoring is orders of magnitude lower than the cost of taking inappropriate decisions.

Within River Basin Management Plans, the following information about monitoring must be provided:

maps of the monitoring networks;

- maps of water status;

- an indication on the maps of the bodies of groundwater which are subject to a significant upward trend in the concentration of pollutants and an indication of the bodies of groundwater in which such trends have been reversed;
- estimates of the levels of confidence and precision attained by the monitoring systems.

Annex V describes three types of monitoring: **surveillance**, **operational**, and **investigative monitoring**. These types are to be supplemented by monitoring programmes required for protected areas.

The objectives of **surveillance monitoring** are to provide information for:

- supplementing and validating the impact assessment procedure;
- the efficient and effective design of future monitoring programmes;
- the assessment of long-term changes in natural conditions; and
- the assessment of long-term changes resulting from widespread anthropogenic activity.

Surveillance monitoring has to be undertaken for at least a period of one year during the period of an RBMP.

BOX 4

River partnerships in Luxembourg

River partnerships are open to anyone who wants to protect water resources and contribute to the improvement of the quality of water in the catchment area of a river basin. Hence river partnerships bring together all stakeholders (e.g. private individuals, farmers, representatives of associations, municipalities, or administrations) in order to identify the problems and find solutions together.

A river partnership generally includes a river committee and several working groups. The river committee is the governing body of the river partnership. Its role is to get an overview of the problems that exist in the catchment area of a river basin, to define objectives for the river partnership, and to ensure the proper

management of the partnership. The role of the working groups is to examine and discuss in greater detail particular topics and, as a result, elaborate proposals for solutions to solve them.

The funding of river partnerships is provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs of Luxembourg and the Greater Region and the municipalities that are affected. European co-funding such as financing by the European Regional Development Fund is possible for transboundary river partnerships between EU member states.

The objectives of operational monitoring are to:

- establish the status of those bodies identified as being at risk of failing to meet their environmental objectives; and
- assess any changes in the status of such bodies resulting from the programmes of measures.

Operational monitoring (or in some cases investigative monitoring) will be used to establish or confirm the status of bodies thought to be at risk. Therefore, it is operational monitoring that will produce the environmental quality ratios used for status classification for those water bodies included in operational monitoring. It is highly focused on parameters indicative of the quality elements most sensitive to the pressures to which the water body or bodies are subject.

Investigative monitoring may also be required in specified cases. These are given as:

- where the reason for any exceedances (of Environmental Objectives) is unknown;
- where surveillance monitoring indicates that the objectives set under Article 4 for a body of water are not likely to be achieved and operational monitoring has not already been established, in order to ascertain the causes of a water body or water bodies failing to achieve the environmental objectives; or

- to ascertain the magnitude and impacts of accidental pollution.

The results of the monitoring would then be used to inform the establishment of a programme of measures for the achievement of the environmental objectives and specific measures necessary to remedy the effects of accidental pollution.

Investigative monitoring will thus be designed to reflect the specific case or problem being investigated. In some cases it will be more intensive in terms of monitoring frequencies and focused on particular water bodies or parts of water bodies, and on relevant quality elements.

Ecotoxicological monitoring and assessment methods would in some cases be appropriate for investigative monitoring.

For the frequency of monitoring and the density of the monitoring network, three key terms are to be considered: **risk**, **precision**, and **confidence**.

Because it is not possible to get the exact value of all indicators at any given time, it will be necessary to estimate the status of water bodies and in particular to identify those that are not of 'good' status or good

ecological potential or are deteriorating in status. Thus status will have to be estimated from the sampled data.

The level of acceptable risk will affect the amount of monitoring required to estimate a water body's status. In general terms, the lower the desired risk of misclassification, the more monitoring (and hence costs) required to assess the status of a water body. It is likely that there will have to be a balance between the costs of monitoring and the risk of a water body being misclassified. Misclassification implies that measures to improve status could be inefficiently and inappropriately targeted. It should also be borne in mind that in general the cost of measures for

the improvement of water status would be orders of magnitude greater than the costs of monitoring. The extra costs of monitoring to reduce the risk of misclassification might therefore be justified in terms of ensuring that decisions to spend larger sums of money required for improvements are based on reliable information on status.

The actual levels of precision and confidence achieved should enable meaningful assessments of status in time and space to be made. Member States will have to quote these levels in RBMPs and will thus be open to scrutiny and comment by others. This should serve to highlight any obvious deficiencies or inadequacies in the future.

4. Integration of the objectives of the WFD into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The European Commission and the Council have repeatedly stressed the need for better integration of the water policy with other policies, such as agriculture. The EU's water policy objectives require action in different policy areas and, consequently, intervention by a range of authorities, which may be pursuing different and potentially contradictory interests.

Agriculture accounts for the largest share of land use in Europe (ca. 50% of overall land area). It has shaped the European landscape and has strongly increased its use of external inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, and water) over the last 50 years. The sector is therefore an important source of environmental pressures. Agriculture in Europe accounts for around 33% of total water use and is the largest source of nutrient pollution in water. As the main user of water, agriculture therefore has a major role to play in the sustainable management of water quantity and quality.

There are currently two instruments which are used to integrate the EU's water policy objectives into the CAP. These are cross-compliance, a mechanism linking

certain CAP payments with specific environmental requirements, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD, also referred to in this report as 'rural development') which provides for financial incentives for measures that go beyond compulsory legislation.

Even if the integration of the WFD objectives into the CAP is a long-term ambition of the European Commission, the results so far are not impressive.

Cross-compliance has increased awareness among farmers and has triggered some changes in farming practices in relation to water. However, the impact of cross-compliance has so far been limited, both because several important water-related issues are not included in cross-compliance, and because of weaknesses in the implementation, enforcement, and control of the cross-compliance requirements.

Rural development funding amounted to almost 100 billion euro for the 2007–13 period. Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on rural development identifies the protection of water as one of the key issues to be addressed. The regulation also stresses that 'the activities of the EAFRD and the operations to which it contributes must be consistent and compatible with the other Community policies',

such as water policy. Rural development therefore has considerable potential, by making funds available and setting clear objectives in relation to water, to contribute to the integration of the EU's water policy objectives into the CAP.

At present, the potential of rural development is not fully exploited. The way RDPs are currently implemented has a limited impact on water because water-related pressures are not comprehensively identified, RDPs and RBMPs are not yet aligned, and negative side effects are not always avoided. In addition, considerable amounts of funding targeting water have not been spent.

BOX 5

Project WAgriCo

Project WAgriCo targeted the need to reduce nitrate pollution from intensive agriculture to protect groundwater bodies. It was implemented in an area of 400,000 ha in the United Kingdom and Germany (Lower Saxony). The key activities of the project were to provide a consultancy service for farmers and implement farm-specific and area-specific measures. Successful measures were then transferred into agro-environmental schemes (EU-funded support for farmers who agreed to implement specific measures on their land above and beyond the obligatory requirements).

5. Financing of preparatory works in the pre-accession period

The main potential source for the financing of preparatory work for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive could be the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). It is renewed for the subsequent financial period of the EU; the IPA II (2014–2020) is currently running. Currently, the beneficiary countries are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey. IPA II also supports Multi-Country Programmes, Cross-Border Programmes, and Rural Development Programmes.

Five principles of how to use the opportunities presented by the Water Framework Directive for healthier rivers

1. The core principle of the Water Framework Directive is a holistic and integrated approach to the management of water resources. Administratively, the management should be organized along river basins or subbasins. In the case of transboundary river basins, international cooperation should be supported by the creation of international bodies and reflected in common river basin management plans.

2. Cooperation among different stakeholders and public participation are necessary. Compromising between different interests and searching for win-win solutions are inseparable parts of any effort to improve the status of water bodies. Whenever one interest totally dominates over the others, the situation cannot be considered sustainable.

3. The background for the development of the river basin management plans should be the analysis of threats and pressures rather than just the status of indicators. Indicators (such as the concentrations of pollutants or the composition of the zoobenthos) can tell us where we are, but knowing the cause of the problem can tell us where to go.

4. Agriculture seems to be one of the sectors which create significant pressures and threats for the health of freshwater ecosystems. The transformation of this sector to a more sustainable form may be the key.

5. Water pricing and other economic measures can be powerful tools for changing the behaviour of consumers, but they should also be accompanied by support for technologies which would help to limit the negative economic impact on stakeholders.

6. Selection of resources and useful links

Water Framework Directive:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

Technical Guidance Documents:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/facts_figures/guidance_docs_en.htm

Articles, brochures, and reports:

Protecting and restoring Europe's waters: An analysis of the future development needs of the Water Framework Directive. Carvalho, L. et al. Science of the Total Environment 658 (2019) 1228–1238.

The EU Water Framework Directive: From great expectations to problems with implementation. Voulvoulis N. et al, Science of the Total Environment 575 (2017) 358–366.

A Handbook for Integrated Water Resources Management in Basins. Global Water Partnership 2009.

Integration of EU water policy objectives with the CAP: a partial success. European Court of Auditors 2014.

European waters. Assessment of status and pressures 2018. EEA report No. 7/2018.

Implementation of the WFD. Good practices as identified by the Member States. European Commission 2012.

'Tips and Tricks' for Water Framework Directive Implementation. WWF March 2014.

About

ARNIKA is uniting people seeking a better environment. We believe that natural wealth is not only a gift, but also an obligation to save it for the future. Since its foundation, Arnika has become one of the most important environmental organizations in the Czech Republic. We base our activities on three pillars: engaging the public, professional arguments, and communication. Since the beginning, we have led public campaigns both in the Czech Republic and internationally. The organization focuses on nature conservation, toxics and waste, access to information, and public participation in decision-making.

more information: www.arnika.org



Download this document

Eco-TIRAS is the umbrella and unites 50+ environmental NGOs of Moldova and Ukraine, which care on the Dniester River. Our view is that only the involvement of all stakeholders, including the public, in the transboundary management of the river basin could improve the situation with regard to the river. We work on the basis of a scientific approach, the knowledge and initiatives of our NGOs' members, and the best international practices. Our dominant interests are: Integrated River Basin Management, international waters (the UNECE Water Convention), public participation, including the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, and environmental education.

more information: www.eco-tiras.org