

Protecting our most precious resource

Precaution, sustainability and effective legislation are needed to better support Europe's drinking water supply

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EurEau's three committees meet three times a year. Our members bring expertise to the federation and national perspectives to our work. This guarantees that the outcome of our work is always high quality and reliable.

EurEau's Committee on Drinking Water covers water supply, drinking water quality and water resources protection. Arjen Frentz (Vewin, The Netherlands) has chaired the committee since 2015. He works closely with three working group chairs: Claudia Castell-Exner (DVGW, Germany) and Jan Peter van der Hoek (Waternet, The Netherlands) on Water Quality; and Jim Marshall (Water UK, UK) on Water Resources. Frentz chairs the working group on Water Supply.

EurEau's goal is to protect surface water and groundwater resources. We focus on key challenges, such as promoting a source control approach for pollutants, highlighting water and energy efficiency in the sector and mitigating the impact of climate change on water resources.

The main concern for the drinking water committee is the evaluation of the Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC). Work has been ongoing by the European Commission with a study carried out on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and the EU-added value of the directive.

We are all looking at the review options, which include an update of water quality parameters, the inclusion of the WHO risk-based approach, information to consumers and an EU-wide approach for materials and products which are fit for purpose with drinking water.

The European Commission will start the review of the directive in 2017. We are contributing to the process and supporting the Commission with their

studies. We participate in stakeholder meetings and group meetings organised by the European Commission. Besides this, we organise meetings with experts and stakeholders to support discussions on policy options. This way, EurEau ensures that policy considerations will also be based on the most up-to-date information.

We are also working on issues such as agriculture and water, pesticides, micropollutants and water reuse. On water reuse, the European Commission may propose minimum quality standards for irrigation and aquifer recharge in 2017.

We want to ensure that the Commission enforces standards to protect the environment and human health, while allowing for cost-effective water reuse in countries that need solutions to tackle water scarcity.

Surface and groundwater

European drinking water is produced from surface water (50%) and groundwater (50%). Protecting these resources from contamination is vital for ensuring clean and safe drinking water. Operators strive to provide this but need robust legislation to preserve resources.

It also requires that EU water legislation, such as the Water Framework Directive (WFD), are properly implemented.

We advocate preventative protection of drinking water resources over water treatment. Water operators treat raw water to comply with the regulatory framework.

The required treatment may involve high costs and environmental impact (for example: energy use). Thus, the end-of-pipe treatment should remain the last option. We need comprehensive



◀ A source-control approach will help reduce emissions at the source and prevent harmful material coming into contact with drinking water.

▶ Overexploitation of groundwater can lead to difficulties with quantity and quality; 50% of Europe's water is taken from the ground.



legislation that is effectively implemented in Member States to better protect the quality of water resources used for drinking water abstraction.

Preventative protection rather than treatment

Our central principle is that preventative protection of drinking water resources should take precedence over water treatment and that a source-control approach should prevent contamination at the origin. The aim is to keep harmful substances away from the water cycle. Measures are:

- ~ Keeping anthropogenic (harmful and persistent) substances away from drinking water resources.
- ~ Preventing contamination at the source.
- ~ Classifying emissions according to possible dangerous effects in line with the state of knowledge and technology.
- ~ No contamination of water resources (both diffuse pollution and industrial discharges) should be tolerated that could endanger the use or suitable use for drinking water abstraction.
- ~ Managing spatial developments.

Water resource protection and planning

Keeping pollutants out of the water cycle is a challenging task. Further EU action has to be taken in the approval, use and disposal of substances and replacing hazardous substances with non-hazardous alternatives, e.g. substances that can be degraded more easily and completely.

The case of groundwater is even more critical as it can be used only to the degree to which it can be renewed since

overexploitation represents a threat to quantity and quality. In the interests of sustainability, strategies for the protection of water bodies should include:

- ~ Improving the EU approval, authorisation and registration of chemical substances by adding adequate drinking water quality related criteria.
- ~ Monitoring for pollution and identifying the pathways by which pollutants enter the water bodies.
- ~ Measures to prevent the use of particular substances.
- ~ Measures to reduce pollution at the source.

The European Commission should take our concerns into account in their revision of the Priority Substances list. This also means we need to urgently address pollution from substances of emerging concern, such as pharmaceuticals and micropollutants.

Furthermore, the goals of article 7.3 of the WFD – which obliges Member States to protect their drinking water resources – should be better incorporated. This will reduce the level of purification treatment required in the production of drinking water.

By advocating our positions to European decision-makers and to Member States, who ultimately are responsible for protecting water resources, we protect consumers' health and the environment.

We urge the European Commission and Member States to better protect water resources. Efficient and effective legislation and environmental awareness are needed to prevent deterioration and improve the quality of water bodies.