



Sustainable Management of Water in Agriculture ***Addressing pressure from agriculture to achieve the goals of the WFD***

SUMMARY REPORT

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In light of the discussion of the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the review of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) policy-makers and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to highlight the need to better integrate the agricultural and water sector in order to better manage natural resources and take the opportunity to better align policies.

Michel Dantin MEP and Chair of the Working Group “Agriculture and Water Management” of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” welcomed participants by stressing the interlinkages between agriculture and water management. The effects of climate change are also forcing agriculture to adapt to ever changing circumstances. The importance of research in this respect was underlined. Further, the issue of water reuse is currently being assessed by the Commission, which will bring forward many questions on water quality with regards to agriculture. It was pointed out that an image problem may arise due to crops being grown with reused water. This debate will therefore need support and scientific knowledge.

Pierre Bascou, Director “Sustainability and income support”, DG AGRI, European Commission underlined the importance to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of water in agriculture both in the current policy framework and under a long-term perspective. He outlined that in general northern Europe is acutely affected by issues related to water quality such as pollution and eutrophication while the southern parts experience mainly problems of quantity (linked to scarcity and excess abstraction). It was said that the multiple benefits that agriculture provides depend on the long term sustainable management of natural resources. The main factors leading to water pressures are nutrients loading, pesticides, and water abstraction. In terms of current policy frameworks there are several policies in place to improve water conditions across Europe mentioning the WFD, the directives on nitrates, floods, drinking quality, and sustainable use of pesticides. The CAP also establishes links with the water policies through cross-compliance, the greening (ecological focus areas and maintenance of permanent grassland) as well as the measures under the second pillar (in particular priorities 4 and 5). Policy instruments and implementation efforts from Member States have progressed but it was recognised that achieving a good status has been slower than expected. There have also been delays in implementation and shortcomings in the river basin management plans due to e.g. lack of coordination and funding. Moving forward and looking at the short term perspective it was said that existing agriculture and environmental legislation is deemed appropriate however improvement is needed in certain areas. It was stressed to firstly improve implementation and evaluate initiatives put in place to identify compliance and enforcement. Secondly, cross



sectorial cooperation is needed between water and agriculture authorities, thus helping improving governance. Thirdly, address investment needs through additional funding mechanisms to be found in order to enhance and improve the management of water in agriculture. The fourth aspect relates to innovation support by making more information, knowledge, good practices and outcomes of research available along with monitoring. In the long term perspective it was said to reflect on how to further integrate issues of water management in the modernisation of the CAP, also mentioning that the public consultation has started on its reform. The need to build bridges between agriculture and society and to use resources more efficiently was stressed. Water is an essential production resource for agriculture, thus the need to increase the environmental and water performance of the CAP and to better address climate change (in terms of policy mix and delivery mechanism). It was said that challenges of implementing legislation must be addressed in order to contribute to the long term objective of making EU agriculture more sustainable, i.e. ensuring food security while securing the good status of water bodies.

Claire McCamphill, Policy Officer “Implementation Water Framework Directive & water policy”, DG ENV, European Commission outlined that the WFD integrated various water legislation into one main framework making it one of the EUs biggest achievements with its adoption in 2000. The deadline to achieve good status of water bodies was in 2015. It was explained that many scientists across the EU had undertaken a heroic effort to work together to define the constituent parts of "good" status comprising ecology, chemical status, groundwater quantity and to ensure that this was comparable across all EU waters. The Commission is in the process of assessing the 2nd river basin management plans to see what kind of progress has been made from the first cycle (where approx. 50% of waters were expected to be at good status by 2015). It was agreed with the colleague from DG AGRI that the main agricultural pressures affecting the achievement of good status waters were nutrients, pesticides and abstraction (for irrigation) and soil erosion is important too. It was underlined that the WFD requires implementation of existing directives e.g. the nitrates directive and to also strengthen the ND implementation where necessary to help meet the WFD good status targets. The WFD also brought in the requirement for Member States to establish additional controls on diffuse phosphate pollution, controls on abstraction, erosion, hydromorphology to address these pressures at source. There seemed to be a misunderstanding on this with many Member States in the first RBMPs assuming that what was being applied under the nitrates directive and existing abstraction controls from 1980s were sufficient for WFD purposes, when in many cases reinforced measures would be necessary and old permit regimes would have to be revised. It was explained that the nitrate concentrations in some Member States exceed the legal limit with the cost of this falling to society e.g. through drinking water bills and the WFD explicitly requires that measures to protect drinking water should be taken at source and not lead to more costly treatment. It was underlined that Member States need to again examine the implementation of controls on nutrients and assess if enough was being done to achieve the WFD. So too for controls on abstraction - when the current standards were established climate change was not yet a political urgency. It was mentioned that controls to protect quality and quantity are in line with subsidiarity left to the Member States to define, but the Commission has worked with



Member States to identify the gaps and to seek that these be addressed in the 2nd RBMPs. It was also said that supplementary measures are an important part of the overall effort to address agriculture pressures on water. The rural development programmes, which can help with advice, training, agri-environment measures such as buffers, wetlands, reduced pesticide use and investments into more efficient water use are an important contributor to achieve WFD targets. However, it was pointed out that the RDPs consist mainly of voluntary measures meaning it also depends on the farmers and whether they wish to improve the good status. The need to move towards targeting RDP measures where they are most needed to deliver the environmental needs was raised. Further it was stressed that authorities in Member States dealing with water and agriculture must collaborate to find synergies and effective win-win solutions. It is hoped that the collaboration among ENV + AGRI and other DGs on water and agriculture will further inspire Member States to enhance cooperation between the relevant ministries and agencies. It was informed that there will be a director level meeting in May on water and agriculture and it is aimed to discuss the issue further in the informal agriculture council taking place at the end of May. DG ENV is currently assessing the second river basin plans, and a report is expected to be presented to Council and Parliament early 2018. This assessment will be a vital component to prepare for the review of the WFD to come.

Claudia Castell-Exner, Vice-president of EurEau presented the water operators' point of view on the sustainable management of water in agriculture. The need for integrated thinking and acting on water and agriculture was stressed as the sectors are closely interlinked. It was said that both sectors operate with direct benefits to and impacts on each other. However, it was pointed out that agriculture does have an evident impact on drinking water resources leading water suppliers to apply additional treatments and increasing the costs for water suppliers leading to higher water bills for consumers. The need for more consistency and coherence of European policies on water and agriculture as well as a proper implementation at Member State level was reiterated mentioning the CAP, the Nitrates Directive, the WFD, the Pesticide Regulation, and the Drinking Water Directive (DWD). It was stressed that one overarching objective when interlinking these policies must be the efficient protection of water resources also calling for a robust evaluation of the policies in order to create the water-agriculture-nexus. With regards to the WFD it was pointed out that Article 7(2) which requires that that Member States ensure that water bodies meet the requirements of the DWD, and 7(3) which asks Member States to ensure the necessary protection for water bodies with the aim to reduce the level of water treatment for the production of drinking water have been overlooked by the majority of Member States. It was said that this has been proven by the lack of measures taken to achieve protection of drinking water resources. It was stressed that Member States often consider collaboration projects between farmers and water utilities as sufficient measures to protect drinking water resources. However it was pointed out that such cooperation is voluntary – some with disappointing results. In the review of the WFD the EU should take the opportunity to reword the articles to make it more ambitious and guide Member States in order to ultimately efficiently protect drinking water resources.



Martina Mlinaric, Senior Policy Officer, Water, WWF stressed the need to underline in what bad state water ecosystems actually are. The most recent WWF's Living Planet Report¹ published in 2016 highlights on average the abundance of populations monitored in the freshwater system has declined by 81 % between 1970 and 2012 (comparing to 38% and 36% for terrestrial and marine specie respectively), which is much more than in any other type of ecosystem. This is in line with EEA's and Commission's reports; for example the State of nature shows that water ecosystems, such as wetlands, are experiencing the most significant deterioration, reaffirming the need to urgently and adequately address the problems. Agriculture was pin pointed as one of the main drivers of freshwater deterioration in Europe: diffuse pollution affects 50% of surface water bodies and 33% of groundwater bodies across the EU, and over-abstraction is a significant problem, especially in Mediterranean region where water resources are not being used efficiently. The WFD is a tool to address these pressures in a holistic manner, but there is lack of political will on the side of Member States to do so. Importance of achieving the EU's biodiversity 2020 headline target has been emphasised; this target goes beyond halting the loss of biodiversity (preventing deterioration) but includes restoration of ecosystems commitment. It was underlined that the WFD with its legally binding requirement of good status provides a good framework for restoration, when implemented. However, experience from the ground shows not only that Member States have failed to adopt measures to address over-abstraction and diffuse pollution from agriculture but that the current common agriculture policy is blocking the restoration agenda of the EU. Another problem with common agricultural policy was outlined; for example in Spain, where over-abstraction is a significant problem, irrigation efficiency funded from rural development programme has seldom led to effective water savings but has done the opposite, as it was said that it has rather lead to higher water use due to expanding the actual irrigated area or changing to more water intensive crops. It was stated that there is a problem with the structure of the agricultural policy and with the implementation at Member State level both of the WFD and CAP. The ongoing collaboration among the DGs was encouraged and it was hoped that it can be replicated at Member State level. As the CAP is under consultation it was said that the structure could be improved mentioning that the new CAP will have to initiate the phasing out of direct payments, including ineffective greening payments, and shift from the current subsidy entitlements to fair multi-annual contracts with society; it was emphasised that farmers should have the chance to earn fair money for their work, however payments to the farming community should be clearly linked to the delivery of results. She concluded by underling that the WFD is a good piece of legislation, fit for purpose and its effective tools underused; example of cost recovery for all water uses was brought up and it was emphasised that if Member States would implement this provision not only would there be funding available to fund required measures but also behavioural change in farming community as regards water use and pollution could occur.

¹ http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/lpr_2016/



Valentin Opfermann, Policy Advisor, COPA-COGECA highlighted that the sustainable management of resources is essential, underlining that farmers are already and will also continue to play their role as they are dependent on such resources. The farming sector is also the sector that is hit the hardest by climate change and needs to quickly adapt. It was stated that environmental objectives along with water policy must be examined but it is also necessary to look at new, unconventional water resources. In this context it was highlighted that the main source of water will in the future be reused wastewater pointing out the need to deal with obstacles linked to this debate such as water quality, liabilities, image problems, infrastructure, nutrients, particles and technical issues. With regards to achieving good status of water it was said the one out all out principle is masking improvements that have been made towards good ecological status, big efforts need to be undertaken with only marginal additional benefits. It was argued that this principle does not properly reflect reality calling for a more flexible approach in assessing overall quality. The importance of research was reiterated as it will play a crucial role for farmers. It must be ensured that money invested in agricultural research will come with practical solutions that are easy and fast to implement. The issue of funding was raised stressing that support is needed to assist farmers when adopting even more sustainable management practices. It was underlined that farmers cannot be the ones to pay for cleaning waste water as the financial means for this are not available. It was stressed that farmers are aware of the role of saving natural resources and progress has been made as they have become more efficient in fertiliser and pesticide use and looking at crop varieties to reduce water usage. It was concluded by reiterating that the farming sector will continue to contribute to this transition.

The discussion with the audience further reiterated the importance of implementing the existing legislation pointing out the environmental, economic, and social benefits it would bring. It was suggested that Europe has a lot of water however most of it is not found in a usable form (sea water) underlining the importance of technology and engineering moving forward. With regards to agriculture it was mentioned that the past years have shown that EU agricultural production has increased at the expense of natural resources. The need for an integrated approach between water and agriculture was reiterated calling for improved and flexible policy adaptable to different farming situations and effective in delivering an improved and protected environment. The different situation found in Member States was raised also underlining that the solutions will therefore vary – though the overall end goal of good status should ensure an even playing field. It was highlighted that the Commission is currently assessing the second river basin management plans, which will examine the measures implemented, from what sectors the pressures are mainly arising from, where are the pressures being addressed, how are the funding mechanisms and available innovations being adequately deployed. It is vital to understand this before any discussion on review of the directive is initiated. Other Studies in addition to the second RBMPs will also inform the evidence base for the review e.g. economically assessing the benefits of EU water policy as well as governance issues. The issue of reuse of urban wastewater was raised with regards to where responsibility should lie to ensure its quality. It was pointed out that farmers do not have the funds to pay for reused water as the process of cleaning it from chemicals, heavy metals, and nutrients is very high. It was argued that several studies show that water



containing nutrients can be used underlining the importance of research. It was further highlighted that reused water containing nutrients can be used however farmers need to know which nutrients are present as different crops have different demands. As with water legislation the CAP is also soon due for review. It was said that the timing of both water and agriculture policy up for review at similar time provides unique opportunity to overcome silo thinking and find an integrated approach that both sectors are looking for. It was underlined that the Commission understands the need for an integrated approach and the DGs are currently learning to speak each others languages in order to understand the various pieces of legislation as only by understanding the policies can synergies be found. The impacts of floods on farmers was raised also stressing the need to implement existing frameworks (FRMPS) which aim to decrease the risk of flooding by implementing among others natural water retention measures along with the need for controls on planning and education in order to change behaviours.

Michel Dantin MEP and Chair highlighted that in order for the parties involved to understand each other it is essential to communicate and speak each others language. Another important aspect is to avoid misunderstandings is transparency along with supporting data which must be shared and integrated. It was said that more trust and responsibility must be given to the local stakeholders working in the field. Concerns regarding quantity and quality must be addressed and solutions provided. The need to exchange experiences in order to disseminate good practices and know-how was also raised. Looking forward it was said that there are also alternative water sources that can be used for water consumption but will need years or even decades to be cleaned and suitable for use.