



To: MEPs Javier LOPEZ, Hildegard BENTELE, Michal WIEZIK, Kai TEGETHOFF, Per CLAUSEN, Pietro FIOCCHI

**Subject: Open letter to rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs on the update of the EU water pollution standards in the European Parliament**

Dear rapporteur, dear shadow rapporteurs,

We are writing to you to share our concerns about the delay of the start of trilogue negotiations on the ongoing update of the EU water pollution standards, regulated under the Water Framework Directive, the Groundwater Directive and the Environmental Quality Standards Directive (directive 2022/0344 (COD)).

Pollutants such as PFAS, pesticides and pharmaceuticals impact our ecosystems and pose risks to our health. Some of them are highly persistent in the environment, requiring urgent action to start monitoring and phase out.

The update of the list of priority pollutants in surface water and groundwater is already long overdue. The lists should be updated at least every 6 years to keep up with the science and ensure water security. However, those updates were last done in 2013 for surface water and in 2014 for groundwater.

Moreover, Member States need urgent clarity on which rules to apply in the upcoming River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for the period 2027-2033. Work on these RBMPs is due to start in 2025, but the current delay in starting trilogue negotiations could result in a material impossibility for Member States to take the revision into account when drafting their plans. This would mean delaying the monitoring and tackling of new substances **not by six months, but by six years.**

The European Parliament successfully adopted its position in September 2023, less than one year after the European Commission's proposal in October 2022. The Council, however, took longer and adopted its position only in June this year. While the Hungarian Presidency committed in its work programme to organise and finalise trilogue negotiations during its mandate and started working on the file in September 2024 in the Working Party for Environment, we are seriously concerned to see that the European Parliament has still not given its formal approval for entering into trilogue negotiations.

The list of priority substances in surface and groundwater has proven to be a useful instrument that has led to some improvements, such as a reduction in the number of water bodies failing to meet standards for several metals listed as priority substances. During the evaluation of the Water Framework Directive in 2018-2019, respondents identified the list of priority substances in the public consultation as one of the factors that contributed the most to progress towards the WFD's objectives.<sup>1</sup>

The lengthy six-year cycle to update the priority substance list means that new substances cannot be added swiftly to the list; if the co-decision process is also unnecessarily prolonged, this also puts water quality at risk. High water quality standards represent a unique regulatory driver for innovation.

In addition, we are also concerned about the attempts of the Council to include new exemptions to Article 4 of the WFD, for temporary deterioration and for allowing deterioration in case of relocation of water or sediment. Competitiveness also means keeping a stable regulatory framework on water in order to drive investment into the water sector. The 'overriding public interest' already offers some flexibility to balance water uses.

The uptake of innovative pollution monitoring technologies has great potential to facilitate the implementation of the updated list of pollutants. The impact assessment of the Commission's proposal also showed that the benefits for society (savings in the cost of water and sludge treatment, a healthier ecosystem and savings in healthcare costs) considerably outweigh the costs of additional monitoring.<sup>2</sup>

We therefore urge you, firstly, to proceed swiftly with the formal approval in order to allow the start of the trilogues under the Hungarian Presidency, and secondly, to defend the European Parliament's position in the trilogues. This will ensure that the regulatory framework meets high standards and allows Member States sufficient time to start monitoring priority substances in the next River Basin Management Plans (2027-2033).

Signatories:

EurEau

European Water Association

Aqua Publica Europea

European Environmental Bureau

WWF European Policy Office

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Fitness Check of the Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Directive, Environmental Quality Standards Directive and Floods Directive, SWD(2019) 439 final. 2019.

[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/c6383764-8b90-4624-b91e-719a477ff870\\_en?filename=swd\\_2019\\_0439\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/c6383764-8b90-4624-b91e-719a477ff870_en?filename=swd_2019_0439_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Executive summary of the impact assessment report, SWD(2022) 543 final. 2022.

[https://environment.ec.europa.eu/document/download/15150e0a-4788-4c20-8a39-bcbc76592da7\\_en?filename=Staff%20Working%20Document%20Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20Impact%20Assessment%20Report%20accompanying%20the%20Proposal.pdf](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/document/download/15150e0a-4788-4c20-8a39-bcbc76592da7_en?filename=Staff%20Working%20Document%20Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20Impact%20Assessment%20Report%20accompanying%20the%20Proposal.pdf)