



MANIFESTO
FOR
HEALTHY WATERS

#HealthyWaters

June 2021

With **70,000 km of coastline** and **111,000 surface waters** including coastal waters, rivers and lakes, bathing and recreational waters are an incredible resource for Europeans.

40% of the European population live in coastal regions and enjoy the coastline and coastal waters on a daily basis. Alongside major conurbations and coastal regions, the areas around rivers and other watercourses are the third most populated area in Europe. These wonderful areas, offering leisure opportunities as well as improving the quality of life and well-being, appeal to Europeans, but not only.

Every year, **millions of European and non-European tourists** come to Europe's coastlines or to the shores of lakes and rivers for swimming, water sports, recreation and relaxation. Europe's coastline is the **main holiday destination** for 63% of European tourists. These marine and fresh waters are treasured by millions of European citizens who occasionally or regularly engage in recreational water activities such as swimming and water sports. **48 million people in Europe are believed to be involved in water sports.** These waters allow people to feel reconnected to and immersed in nature, they contribute to increasing physical activity and are an incredible source of therapeutic benefits and well-being and represent an exceptional cultural richness and heritage.

Seas, lakes and rivers in Europe are also incredible ecosystems, home to an **exceptional and precious – yet fragile and vulnerable - biodiversity**, with up to **50,000 species** living in our waters from the coast to the deep sea.

Europe is also economically very dependent on its waters as a source for leisure activities. Maritime and coastal tourism is the most important maritime economic activity, employing **3.2 million people** and generating more than **€183 billions** of gross added value in the EU. It accounts for a third of all tourism activities in the EU - the world's leading tourist destination - and provides 51% of tourist accommodation in Europe. In some parts of Europe, and most notably islands, it is not only an additional source of income for coastal communities **but dominates the local economy.**

And yet, **the quality of European waters is threatened by a myriad of pollution** coming from land and sea-based human activities: urban and agricultural run-off, discharges from industrial activities and wastewater, overflows, maritime transport and offshore exploitation of resources. Growingly urban and artificial coastlines also contribute to altering and polluting the natural water cycle and reducing its resilience.

At the same time, water is used in abundance in the industrial and domestic sectors where it is mixed with our consumer products waste and «toxic» substances. Most of this «polluted» water is collected and treated by treatment plants before being discharged into the environment. But current treatment techniques and methods do not make it possible to treat and purify all the substances produced and discharged by humans.

This pollution can take different forms: **bacteriological pollution** with the presence in water of pathogenic microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses or parasites, coming from urban waste, wastewater and run-off water, yachting or cruise-type tourism; **chemical pollution** present in the soil, air or aquatic environments. At present there are more than 100,000 listed chemical substances which include heavy metals, hydrocarbons, drug residues, pesticides or fertilisers. Only 38% of surface waters (rivers, lakes and transitional and coastal waters) are classified as being in good chemical status in Europe; **nutrient pollution**, primarily **nitrates** and **phosphates**, caused by the use of pesticides in agriculture and consumer products such as detergents used by households and from activities at sea such as shipping and aquaculture; **algae blooms** which result from the input of excess nutrients into European waters and are exacerbated by climate change, which warms coastal waters and rivers, and **marine litter and plastics** found on the coast, on the water surface, in the water column and on the sea floor, either in macro or micro form. The vast majority are made of plastic and can be counted in millions of tons in the marine environment.

The pollution of our environment and therefore of our European waters weighs very heavily on the health of Europeans. The effects on health can be direct due to exposure through bathing or recreational and sporting activities in or in contact with water and result in nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach aches, fever, respiratory infections, hepatitis, ear, eye, nose and throat infections, as well as salmonellosis, cholera and fatal diseases in highly polluted water. Bathers, coastal communities and most notably people who practise recreational activities are particularly exposed to this pollution as they are generally in contact with the environment for a longer period of time and because they visit European waters throughout the year and on a frequent and repeated basis.

Around three-quarters (73%) of EU citizens surveyed think the **EU should propose additional measures to tackle water-related problems**, with no fewer than eight out of ten Europeans (84%) believing **chemical pollution is a threat to the aquatic environment**.

While bathing water quality has improved over the years, there is yet an urgent need to mitigate emerging pressures and adapt the European Bathing Water Directive to current usage and today's impacts. To do so, the Directive needs to be thoroughly revised so that the way water quality is controlled, and the parameters used to assess the quality of our waters better and adequately reflect the pollution that our waters face and allow for a better protection of the environment and of our health.

As EU institutions are considering now revising the Bathing Water Directive, civil society organisations, environmental NGOs, public and private stakeholders, researchers, water sports athletes and federations have come together to call on the European Union to improve water quality in all marine and freshwater environments and do more to ensure healthy European waters for all Europeans, no matter what time of year they go in the water or what watersport they participate in.

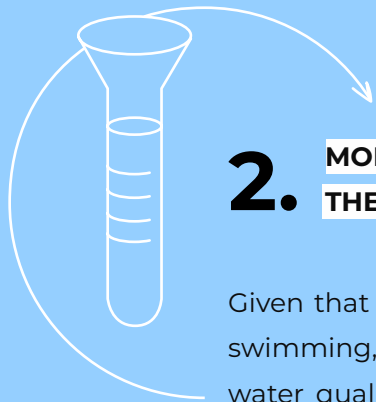
ALL EUROPEAN CITIZENS SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO ENJOY RECREATIONAL AND WATER SPORT ACTIVITIES WITHOUT HEALTH RISKS, IN EXCELLENT WATER QUALITY AND IN A PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.





1. **EXTEND WATER QUALITY CONTROL TO RECREATIONAL AND WATER SPORTS AREAS**

Recreational and aquatic leisure activities are very popular in Europe and go beyond simple swimming. Water sports enthusiasts are more exposed to health risks because they very often practice outside the bathing areas as defined in the regulations and their practice times are longer. Moreover, there is no physical boundary between «bathing water» and «recreational water». Water pollution is diffuse and affects water regardless of the use made of it.



2. **MONITOR WATER QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

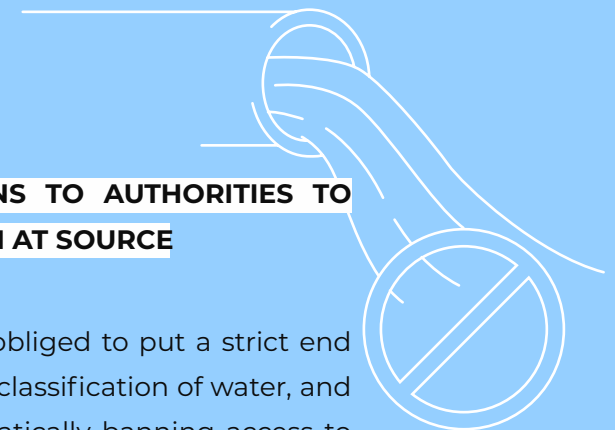
Given that water-based recreational activities, including swimming, can be enjoyed all year round, we call for water quality monitoring to be carried out throughout the year in order to protect all those who use the sea.



3. **ADD NEW PARAMETERS TO BE MONITORED AND TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE SITES :**

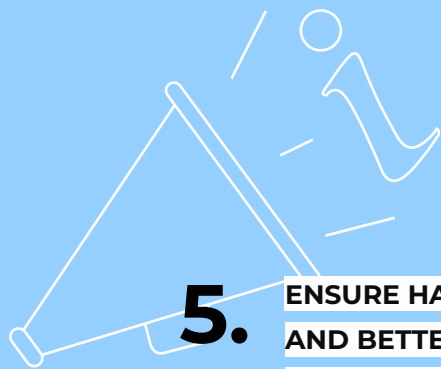
Chemical pollutants, harmful algal blooms and cyanobacteria, as well as waste and plastics.

Given the magnitude and variety of pollution sources impacting our water bodies, we cannot reasonably limit the quality control of our waters to the assessment of two bacteriological criteria, a two-month monitoring period and four samples.



4. **IMPOSE OBLIGATIONS TO AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT POLLUTION AT SOURCE**

Public authorities should be obliged to put a strict end to pollution, regardless of the classification of water, and without the option of systematically banning access to bathing or recreational areas as this latter option does not provide any incentive to tackle pollution at source.



5. ENSURE HARMONISED, MORE ACCESSIBLE AND BETTER RELAYED INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC ON THE QUALITY OF WATER

Public information needs to provide different reading levels with playful and simplified communication for a wide audience and the opportunity to acquire knowledge for a well-informed public. It must be made available both on site and online.

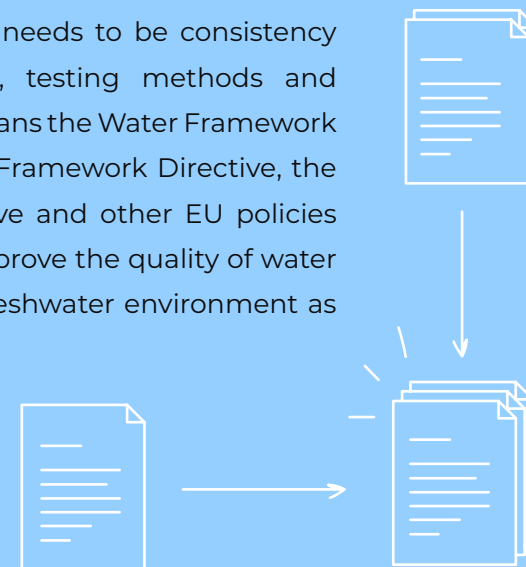


6. STRENGTHEN AND ENCOURAGE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Member States should step up their communication on public participation and consult citizens as well as the representatives of water sports and the community of bathers and water sports enthusiasts in Europe on a regular basis and through various media. This consultation should cover more areas than the list of sites to be monitored.

7. HARMONISE ALL POLICIES IMPACTING ON WATER AND MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

Whether for domestic, industrial, or recreational use, all sector-specific and non-sector-specific policies as well as texts governing the management of marine or fresh water must be aligned. There needs to be consistency in the monitoring processes, testing methods and monitored parameters. This means the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Wastewater Treatment Directive and other EU policies must be aligned in order to improve the quality of water and protect the marine and freshwater environment as well as human health.



[READ THE FULL ONLINE VERSION HERE](#)



Close to **50 organisations** have already signed up to the European Manifesto for Healthy Waters.

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SIGNATORIES



INDIVIDUAL SIGNATORIES

Farida AKCHA, senior researcher in marine ecotoxicology at IFREMER

Dr Easkey BRITTON, surfer and professional marine social scientist

Greg CAIAZZO, vice world champion (master category) in lifesaving sport

Thomas DELFINO, professional snowboarder

Ronaldo E.C.D. GABRIEL, researcher

Jean-Baptiste GIMIE, world champion (master category) in lifesaving sport

Jerôme LABINOWSKI, researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research



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Surfrider Foundation Europe is a European not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and enhancement of Europe's lakes, rivers, ocean, waves and coastlines. It was created in Europe (Biarritz) by a group of surfers who wanted to preserve their playground. Grass-roots activism to protect our ocean and coasts is at the core of the organisation which currently has over 13,000 members and is active across 12 countries through its volunteer-run branches. For 30 years, Surfrider Foundation Europe has been taking action as a recognized authority in 3 areas of expertise: marine litter, water quality and health, coastal management and climate change. Visit our website: www.surfrider.eu