



Press release – October 5, 2023 | For immediate release

## **EP'S REPORT ON UPDATING WASTEWATER RULES RECEIVES LUKEWARM REACTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS**

**Today, the European Parliament approved new standards for wastewater management and treatment. Although Surfrider Foundation Europe and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) welcome the EP's overall support to update wastewater treatment rules in Europe, concerns remain as MEPs chose to water down some key provisions of the Directive.**

Today, a vast majority of MEPs (420 of 566) across all political groups voted in favour of the Environment Committee's position to revise the existing 30-year-old Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD). The outcome of this decision at the Parliament generated very mixed feelings among EU environmental civil society organizations as key threats to aquatic ecosystems and human health remain inadequately addressed.

Following the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) vote which took place two weeks ago, the European Parliament has confirmed the need to fight against water pollution and upgrade the norms for wastewater management in Europe. Surfrider Europe and the EEB support several of the amendments produced by the Parliament, including those aiming to better address eutrophication as well as improved monitoring of pollutants entering and exiting wastewater treatment plants. The stronger focus put on specific groups of substances like PFAS is also a welcome addition. However, while these constitute steps in the right direction, key provisions of the text remain a source of serious concern.

**NGOs regret the many missed opportunities to future-proof the Directive**

Instead of further strengthening the Commission's proposal and pursuing higher ambitions to achieve a toxic-free environment, several of the amendments adopted today run the risk of weakening the reach of the Directive.

Provisions to the treatment of chemical pollution in urban wastewater suffered serious undermining after the vote. We are deeply concerned by the fact that MEPs substantially weakened the standards determining which plants would need to be upgraded to remove micropollutants. The dilution of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) mechanism initially proposed by the European Commission is also a major disappointment. This instrument is key to the enforcement of the polluter pays principle. Although we support the Parliament's initiative to extend the scope of sectors to be covered by the EPR in the future, the series of exemptions added in the amendments as well as the proposed allocation of part of the upgrade costs to national financing will seriously undermine its implementation.

Finally, the risks posed by stormwater overflows remain insufficiently tackled. Even though MEPs gave their approval to the establishment of integrated urban wastewater management plans requiring agglomerations to better manage urban wastewater to prevent sewage spills caused by rain, we are concerned about their proposal to open the possibility for Member States to adopt laxer targets to limit overflows as well as the limited transparency of the plans.

**Lucille Labayle**, Water Quality and Health Policy Officer, Surfrider Foundation Europe said: "Standards for the collection and treatment of wastewater in Europe are more than 30 years old and overlook some key sources of pollution posing a threat to the environment and human health. In that sense, today's vote is a welcome overhaul of the Directive, and we welcome the MEPs' efforts to pursue the revision process. Yet, we are left with a bittersweet feeling. The Parliament has missed the opportunity to further raise the ambitions of the text to accelerate our transition to achieve the EU's zero pollution vision for 2050."

**Sara Johansson**, Senior Policy Officer for Water Pollution Prevention at the European Environmental Bureau said:

We welcome that the European Parliament have adopted their position on EU rules for wastewater management and treatment but regret the weakened provisions on micropollutant removal. We would also have expected the Parliament to fulfil its duty to enforce the polluter pays principle instead of introducing new exemptions from the proposed – and much-needed 'Extended Producer Responsibility'.

**Some cause for rejoicing amidst disappointment**

One of the key highlights of this revision process is the introduction of provisions to curb biocarrier pollution. The NGOs especially applauded the EP's support of amendments regarding the prevention and monitoring of biomedica to prevent their spills into the environment. MEPs introduced a robust set of complementary measures that should allow for the successful enforcement and control of this source of chronic and diffuse plastic pollution.

**Lucie Padovani**, Marine Litter Policy Officer, Surfrider Foundation Europe said *"Biomedica losses caused by WasteWater Treatment Plants are still a widely overlooked issue, despite catastrophic cases occurring across Europe that provide evidence of the impacts of this plastic and chemical pollution on the marine environment. Hence, we applaud the significant milestones achieved in finally addressing this pollution through EU legislation and in the European Parliament's endorsement for further preventive measures."*

Following the adoption of the European Parliament's position today, Surfrider Europe and the EEB now call on Member States to maintain ambition in their agreement on the file. We remain hopeful that the discussions in the Council and during the upcoming trilogue can still ensure the revised UWWTD is fit for purpose to protect the environment and human health, and thus support the objectives of the European Green Deal.

ENDS

### **Notes to editors**

Joint NGO reaction to the vote in ENVI committee [here](#)

The Council is expected to agree on their general approach on the UWWTD on 16 October. After that inter-institutional negotiations can begin.

### **About Surfrider Foundation Europe**

*Surfrider Foundation is a group of positive activists who take concrete action on the ground every day to pass on a preserved ocean to future generations. Our mission: to make the voice of the ocean heard loud and clear! Our weapons? Raising awareness and mobilising citizens, children and adults alike (thanks in particular to 48 volunteer branches throughout Europe), using our scientific expertise to lobby and transform companies. Find out more about the association on <https://surfrider.eu/>*

### **About European Environmental Bureau**

*EEB is the largest network of citizens' environmental organisations in Europe. It currently has over 180 member organisations in 40 countries, including a growing number of networks, and represents some 30 million individual members and supporters. We advocate progressive policies to create a better environment in the European Union and beyond. Find out more about the association at <https://eeb.org/about/>*

**CONTACT SURFRIDER FOUNDATION EUROPE :**

Lionel Cheylus | Medias Relations Officer | +33 6 08 10 58 02 | [lcheylyus@surfrider.eu](mailto:lcheylyus@surfrider.eu)



Surfrider Foundation Europe's "Healthy Water" campaign is supported by the LIFE programme created by the European Commission. The European Commission's support to produce this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the content, which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.