



Recast of the UWWTD – the European Parliament votes in favour of A revamped urban wastewater Directive

Press release | Wednesday 10 April 2024

Today, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted in favour of the revised text of the Urban WasteWater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) negotiated.

Following the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) vote which took place on March 11, the European Parliament just approved in plenary the provisional agreement struck last January 29 on the proposal to review the UWWTD. This long-awaited recast comes more than 30 years after the initial adoption of the Directive. Despite regrets over some provisions falling short on challenges that will be key for the sector and society in the future, civil society organisations strongly welcome the EP's support for the negotiated text.

A much needed recast of the Directive supported by civil society organisations...

Today's vote enshrines the protection of both human health and the environment as the core objectives of the UWWTD. We certainly welcome the co-legislators' efforts to update the Directive to better reflect and curb the current sources of pollution of our aquatic and marine ecosystems.

A key cause for celebration in this revised text is the inclusion of biomedica pollution for the first time in the EU legislation. The outcome of the trilogue negotiations and subsequent votes in the EP on the issue, confirming the co-legislators' intent to curb this major source of plastic pollution through an overarching definition of what biomedica are, clear requirements to monitor their use and establish preventive measures to avoid spills and specific conditions to grant discharge authorisations.

Lucie Padovani, Marine Litter Policy Officer, Surfrider Foundation Europe says:

"Biomedica losses caused by wastewater treatment plants were a widely overlooked issue, despite catastrophic cases occurring for years across Europe providing evidence of the impacts of this plastic and chemical pollution on the marine environment. Hence, we applaud the institutions for reaching a milestone agreement and endorsing pioneering measures to curb this pollution. "

...despite regrets over some toned-down ambitions

Despite the progress achieved throughout the revision process, it is regrettable to witness that the co-legislators did not follow through on some of their initial intentions.

All the deadlines initially introduced in the Commission's proposal have been postponed and numerous derogations conceded as this will further delay the full implementation of the Directive, including on already-existing obligations. Even though the introduction of integrated management plans constitutes a unique opportunity to make our cities climate-proof, the failure to establish binding targets through the different rounds of interinstitutional negotiations is regrettable. Finally, opening up the possibility to complement the EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) schemes with national financing programmes enters in contradiction with the concept of the Polluter Pays Principle.

Lucille Labayle, Water Quality and Health Policy Officer at the Surfrider Foundation Europe says:

"We strongly welcome today's vote as the negotiated text presents undeniable improvements to the 30-year-old Directive. Yet, we cannot refrain from facing contradictory feelings as the institutions had the chance to boldly raise the ambitions of the text and fast-track our progress towards the EU's zero pollution goal. We regret that the current text misses several opportunities to live up to our expectations but remain confident that with a robust implementation, we will achieve healthier waters everywhere in Europe."

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

"We welcome that MEPs have approved the negotiated agreement on urban wastewater rules. While not fully embracing the opportunity to adapt cities to climate change, the deal is a step in the right direction towards addressing micropollutants and holding polluters accountable. Next, over to the Council to seal the deal!"

Despite some disappointments, the new UWWTD remains an essential EU instrument and roadmap to tackle the pollution of our aquatic and marine environment. Due to the corrigendum procedure, the final text of the Directive is not expected to be formally approved and published in the Official Journal of the European Union before autumn this year. Surfrider Foundation and the EEB call on EU decision-makers to guarantee a swift process and ensure the Directive enters into force as soon as possible to contribute to better water quality across the EU.

We remain at the disposal of journalists for any requests for information or interviews.

About Surfrider Foundation Europe

The NGO 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 speak out loud and clear for the Ocean! Our weapons? Raising awareness and mobilizing 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 at <https://surfrider.eu/> or via [this video](#)

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