
Reducing pollution in EU groundwater and surface waters

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- A watch list containing substances of emerging concern to better monitor pollution
 - Threshold values should be ten-times lower for groundwater than for surface water
 - Producers selling products that contain polluting chemical substances should help finance monitoring
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Environment Committee MEPs adopted their position on protecting groundwater and surface waters from pollution and improving water quality standards.

The new law, on which MEPs adopted their position with 69 votes in favour, four against and 15 abstentions, revises the [Water Framework Directive](#), the [Groundwater Directive](#) and the [Environmental Quality Standards Directive](#) (Surface Water Directive). The aim of the revisions is better protecting human health and natural ecosystems from pollutants.

Stricter monitoring of substances

MEPs propose that the “watch list” - which contains substances or groups of substances where there is an indication that they pose a significant risk to human health and the environment - should not be limited to a maximum of substances as proposed by the Commission. This list must, they say, be updated regularly to keep up with new scientific evidence and the fast-evolving pace of emerging new chemicals.

The Environment Committee wants a number of substances to be added to the watch list as soon as suitable monitoring methods are identified, including microplastics, antimicrobial resistant microorganisms and selected antimicrobial resistance genes, as well as possibly sulfates, xanthates and non-relevant pesticide metabolites.

Prevent groundwater pollution

To better protect the EU's ground water MEPs demand the threshold values applicable to groundwater be ten times lower than those for surface water.

They also want a subset of specific PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) as well as the PFAS total (parameter which includes the totality of PFAS with a maximum concentration) to be added to the list of groundwater pollutants, as these substances have been detected in more than 70% of the groundwater measuring points in the EU. Similarly, MEPs want stricter standards for glyphosate, bisphenol (bisphenol total), atrazine, pharmaceuticals and non-relevant metabolites of pesticides.

Polluters should pay

The cost of monitoring substances is now solely financed by member states and, with the ever-changing number of chemicals being detected, monitoring costs are likely to increase. MEPs therefore want the producers of products that contain polluting substances to contribute to this, and have asked the Commission to assess the creation of an extended producer responsibility mechanism.

Quote

After the vote, rapporteur [Milan Brglez](#) (S&D, SI) said: "The revision of EU water legislation, including the Water Framework Directive and its two daughter directives, is one of the key policy tools to implement our commitments under the Zero-Pollution Action Plan. Enhanced protection of EU waters is extremely important, especially in the context of the ever more pressing impacts of climate change - combined with industrial and agricultural pollution - on our fresh water resources."

Next steps

Parliament is scheduled to adopt its negotiating mandate during the September 2023 plenary session after which talks with national governments on the final form of the law can start, once the Council has adopted its position.

Background

In line with the [European Green Deal](#)'s zero pollution ambition, the Commission tabled in October 2022 a [proposal](#) to revise the lists of surface water and groundwater pollutants that need to be monitored and controlled to protect the EU's freshwater bodies.

Further information

[Compromise amendments](#)

[Committee debate \(22.03.2023\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)


[Legislative train](#)


[EP Research Service: Pollutants in EU waters - Update of chemical substances listed for control](#)

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