

World Water Day: Protecting our tap water and aquatic ecosystems from pesticide pollution

On the UN World Water Day (22nd March) and 3d day of the Pesticide Action Week¹, PAN Europe takes the opportunity to highlight that pesticides are one of the main sources of pollution of European waters, causing degradation of our aquatic ecosystems and jeopardizing the future of EU water supplies.

Water quality management varies across EU Member States (MS). On one side, Denmark has banned the use of pesticides on thousands of hectares to sustainably protect the quality of its ground water supplies², while on the other side, France for example, is closing down its drinking water wells because of their high content of dangerous pesticides³. In fact, in many areas of intensive agriculture in France, citizens are regularly obliged to stop drinking tap water because of pesticide contamination. Likewise, in UK, between 2004/05 and 2008/09, water companies spent £92 million to purify water from pesticides, while in Sweden, the national action plan on pesticides⁴ calls for zero pesticide residues in well-waters.

The Water Framework Directive, the EU's pillar for fresh water policy, provides specific limits for pesticides in water resources to protect humans and the environment. Similarly, the pesticide regulation (1107/2009/EC) aims to protect human, the environment and its ecosystems from the harmful effects of pesticides. Despite the legislation, water monitoring data clearly indicate that the state of our blue gold is in a bad position. In the EU, 7% of ground waters exceed the pesticides limits⁵.

Martin Dermine, PAN Europe's project coordinator said *"Two recent examples reveal that even by banning a pesticide one does not prevent citizens or the environment from being exposed: in the Netherlands, a quarter of the groundwater is close to or exceeds the permitted levels, including banned pesticides⁶. Along the same line, atrazine, a reprotoxic and endocrine disrupting herbicide that was banned 25 years ago is found in excessive amounts in wells from the Po basin in Italy. In this region of intensive agriculture, impressive quantities of glyphosate, neonicotinoids and atrazine are regularly detected⁷. These few examples clearly indicate that the authorised uses of pesticides contaminate our water resources in an intensive and long lasting way"*.

Angeliki Lyssimachou, PAN Europe's ecotoxicology expert added: *"42% of EU's freshwater ecosystems suffer from chronic toxicity because of pesticide pollution⁸. The current risk assessment/risk management system fails to protect our aquatic ecosystems and contributes to the environmental degradation we experience today. European Regulators should take action to improve substantially the protection of our blue gold for the benefit of our health and that of our environment that are closely interconnected"*.

¹ <http://www.pesticideactionweek.org/>

² <http://www.low-impact-farming.info/sites/default/files/2017-03/town-voices.pdf>, p.6-7

³ <https://www.actu-environnement.com/ae/news/abandon-captages-eau-pollution-diffuses-cout-15117.php4>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/plant/docs/pesticides_sup_nap_sweden_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agri-environmental_indicator_-_pesticide_pollution_of_water

⁶ <http://nltimes.nl/2016/10/11/pesticides-netherlands-ground-water-revealed-minister-concerned>

⁷ <http://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/pubblicazioni/rapporti/sostenibilita-ambientale-delluso-dei-pesticidi.-il-bacino-del-fiume-po>

⁸ MalajE, von der OhePC, Grote M, KuhneR et al. (2014). Organic chemicals jeopardize the health of freshwater ecosystems on the continental scale. *PNAS*111: 9549-9554