

Brussels, 12/09/2023

Clear message from Parliament: we must tackle water pollution

Today, the European Parliament approved new quality standards for surface and groundwater and sent a clear message on the need to curb water pollution in the EU.

A vast majority of MEPs (495 of 631) across all political groups voted in favour of the Environment Committee's position to update the list of surface and groundwater pollutants against which chemical status under the Water Framework Directive is assessed.

This includes approval of thresholds for several critical substances in natural waters, including several pesticides, pharmaceuticals – which would be the first time we would have EU-wide thresholds for pharmaceuticals in natural waters – and a group of 24 PFAS. Member States would need to monitor these substances in water and make sure thresholds are not surpassed.

The report also withstood a last-minute attempt by EPP to water down provisions to protect groundwater.

Not only does this send a clear message about the broad political desire to improve the quality of Europe's waters, but it also signals to the European Council to progress with forming an opinion so that negotiations on the file can begin and an agreement can be reached between the three EU institutions.

Sara Johansson, Senior Policy Officer for Water Pollution Prevention at the EEB, said "Freshwater biodiversity is under threat by harmful substances from agriculture, cities and industry. The outcome of today's vote shows that the European Parliament wants to turn the tide and improve monitoring and protection of Europe's waters."

Manon Rouby, Policy Officer/ Legal Adviser at PAN Europe, said "Recurring pesticide contamination poses a significant threat to water quality and aquatic life as well as unnecessary costs to European water companies. Today, the European Parliament has shown a strong and much-needed commitment to address water pesticide pollution and strengthen the quality standards for surface water and groundwater."

Lucille Labayle, Water Quality and Health Policy Officer at Surfrider Foundation Europe, said "Poor water quality in the EU is compromising our right to enjoy a safe environment. Today, the European Parliament took an ambitious stance. Better monitoring and more stringent standards will pave the way to healthy waters for all".

ENDS

Notes to editors

Last October, the European Commission put forward a proposal for updated priority substances and groundwater pollutants, in a Directive that would amend the Water Framework Directive, the Environmental Quality Standards Directive and the Groundwater Directive.

The proposal updates the lists of surface and groundwater pollutants against which chemical status under the Water Framework Directive is assessed.

The Council began discussing their position in June this year and once they have adopted their

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position, negotiations will start between the European Parliament and the Council.

Joint NGO reaction to the position of the Environment Committee <https://eeb.org/european-parliament-calls-for-action-to-curb-water-pollution/>

Contacts:

- PAN Europe: Manon Rouby, Policy Officer/ Legal Adviser, +336 43 24 33 79, manon@pan-europe.info
- European Environmental Bureau: Sara Johansson, Senior Policy Officer, +32 2 790 24 79, sara.johansson@eeb.org
- Surfrider: Lucille Labayle, Water Quality and Health Policy Officer, labyale@surfrider.eu



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