



**COUNCIL OF
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Subject : Water scarcity and droughts
- Draft Council conclusions

1. On 20 July 2007, the Commission submitted its communication addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union.
2. The issue was discussed at the informal meeting of Environment Ministers in Lisbon on 1 September 2007.
3. Coreper reached agreement on draft Council conclusions on 12 October 2007.
4. The Council (Environment) on 30 October 2007 is invited to adopt the draft conclusions set out in the Annex to this Note.

WATER SCARCITY AND DROUGHTS (WS&D)

- draft Council conclusions -

The Council of the European Union,

1. RECALLS that water scarcity and droughts (WS&D) are problems with relevant socio-economic and environmental impacts in the European Union; NOTES that their occurrence has been increasing in both intensity and frequency in recent years, affecting Member States and neighbouring countries at different levels; RECALLS the request for European action on WS&D from the Environment Council in June 2006 and the results of the informal meeting of Environment Ministers on this subject, which took place in Lisbon in September 2007;
2. RECOGNISES that Climate Change (CC) is expected to influence the baseline of present WS&D issues, with potential impacts on water quantity and quality, contributing in particular to an increase in extreme hydrological events, such as floods and droughts; NOTES that a link between WS&D and CC and their associated adaptation strategies, including the aspects already dealt with in the EC Green Paper on adaptation to climate change in Europe, should be integrated into the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) as far as possible;
3. WELCOMES the Commission communication entitled “Addressing the Challenge of Water Scarcity and Droughts in the European Union”, adopted on 18 July 2007, as a fundamental and well-developed first set of policy options for future action, within the framework of EU water management principles, policies and objectives; NOTES that the communication requires a clear commitment from the EU as a whole, to establish the adequate conditions for implementing the actions envisaged therein and to develop further knowledge;

4. ACKNOWLEDGES that the problem of water scarcity and droughts cannot only be confined to its European aspect since it has international repercussions, such as a direct relation with poverty and migration; RECOGNISES that it is important for the European Union to consider the international dimension when dealing with this matter and to pursue the achievement of the international commitments of the European Community and its Member States, in particular the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity;
5. RECOGNISES that integrated water management will contribute to mitigating water scarcity and drought impacts and therefore CALLS UPON the Commission and all the Member States to enhance their efforts to implement the EU Water Initiative as a privileged tool to progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals;
6. ACKNOWLEDGES that the full implementation of the WFD, the EU's flagship Directive on water policy, is a major priority; STRESSES that the WFD establishes a framework of great value, innovation and scope for integrated water management in Europe, while providing tools for achieving good status in all European waters, promoting sustainable water use, contributing to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts and encompassing a flexible approach in addressing environmental objectives;
7. RECALLS that some concerns regarding quantitative aspects, which influence the achievement of the environmental objectives, have been identified during the ongoing implementation of the WFD, particularly dealing with floods, water scarcity and droughts; RECALLS that the recently adopted Directive on the assessment and management of floods will contribute to the achievement of these objectives and RECOGNISES that WS&D have become increasingly important at the technical and political level;

8. ACKNOWLEDGES that water scarcity and droughts have a direct impact on citizens and economic sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, industry, energy and transport, significantly affects natural resources, places stress on ecosystems and habitats thus endangering biodiversity and otherwise affects the environment as a whole; NOTES that there is a close connection between droughts, soil degradation and desertification, particularly in semi-arid regions, in terms of the direct impact on the performance of soil functions and STRESSES the broader impacts of droughts in terms of increased risks of forest fires and the consequent significant effects on atmospheric pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases;
9. UNDERSTANDS that water scarcity on the one hand, and drought on the other, should be considered different matters, in as much as water scarcity should refer to water imbalances between supply and long-term demand, while drought should refer to significant decreases in average levels of natural water availability; RECOGNISES that it is not possible to control the occurrence of droughts, although the resulting impacts may be mitigated to a certain degree through appropriate surveillance and management strategies in the context of the WFD among others;
10. RECALLS that, as shown by the Commission's assessment, with respect to water scarcity several Member States, representing at least 12% of EU territory and 19% of the EU population, have also been affected, with at least 33 river basins concerned; NOTES that the worst-affected river basins are located in southern Europe, but that nonetheless northern and eastern countries have also identified river basins subject to water scarcity;
11. RECALLS that the Commission's in-depth assessment, presented in 2007, shows that droughts have concerned all EU countries to varying degrees and that, recent events (2003) have affected more than 100 million inhabitants (20%) and a third of the EU territory; NOTES that the total economic impact of drought at EU level over the last 30 years is estimated at EUR 100 billion;

12. HIGHLIGHTS that the ineffective management of water resources is a fundamental problem which influences water scarcity and can induce additional impacts when a drought occurs, even though it cannot generate a drought in itself, the latter being a natural phenomenon; CONSIDERS that the implementation of the demand-side approach, the enhancement of water efficiency (e.g. reduction of leakages) and further educational measures must be a clear priority, even though in some circumstances it might be necessary to consider further approaches on the supply side to address the impacts of WS&D;
13. UNDERLINES that River Basin Management Plans, as established under the WFD, should take due account of the balance between demand and supply, including seasonal and inter-annual analyses, to achieve the environmental objectives and consider the need for new water supply measures once the projected impacts of water saving measures prove insufficient; NOTES that these supply measures may consist of traditional or alternative options, including, for example, waste water re-use and desalination, carried out under sustainable conditions;
14. STRESSES that a comprehensive approach to addressing the issues of water scarcity and droughts is a fundamental requirement for achieving water policy objectives and moving towards sustainable development. This approach should include, inter alia, the effective implementation of integrated water resources management, the strengthening of water demand management and water saving policies, the implementation of the "user-pays" principle in accordance with the WFD, the incorporation of sustainable water use concerns into other sectoral policies (e.g. agriculture, forestry, regional development, tourism, energy production), land-use and inland water-ways planning, and an assessment of aquatic ecosystems and their functions;
15. NOTES that the water pricing provisions of the WFD will provide an incentive to promote more efficient use of water resources while guaranteeing equitable public access to them and taking social aspects into account. In this context, awareness-raising campaigns can be an important tool for promoting water saving practices;

16. NOTES the Commission's intention to explore how sectoral policies could better and further contribute to effective water management, using associated funds to foster the delivery of environmental services by water users in an efficient way, to examine the access conditions of the Solidarity Fund and to consider all opportunities to incorporate drought issues in future annual work programmes of the Civil Protection Mechanism;
17. UNDERLINES the need to pay special attention to the further development and, if necessary, adaptation of current agriculture policies to contribute to sustainable water management; NOTES the Commission's intention to include management of water scarcity in the forthcoming CAP Health Check and to further assess the inter-linkages between bio-fuel development and water availability;
18. RECOMMENDS that water scarcity issues be dealt with, as far as possible, through the implementation of an appropriate set of measures within the River Basin Management Plans, including identifying the necessary adaptation strategies for climate change and coordinated water resources management in international river basins; RECOGNISES that transboundary agreements between riparian states are necessary to tackle the problem of water scarcity;
19. UNDERLINES the need to move from a crisis-management approach to prevention and preparedness actions to tackle the impacts of droughts; CALLS for a common approach to drought risk assessment and drought management planning, consistent with the WFD, to be jointly developed by the Commission and the Member States in the near future, given that droughts, with their specific regional characteristics, are a serious natural hazard for a range of Member States and have potential transboundary impacts in various regions of the European Union; NOTES that drought management planning should include *inter-alia* cross-border coordination, public participation and warning systems, and should be developed in the potentially affected areas at the appropriate level;

20. SUPPORTS the work currently under way to contribute to a more transparent application of the relevant exemptions set under the WFD, in particular the definition of “prolonged droughts”, and its implications for achieving environmental objectives during and after drought periods;
21. CONSIDERS that arrangements for establishing a platform for data-collection and research activities, which is based on and closely interlinked with the existing structures and activities of the EEA, ESA and the Commission, are an important measure setting the conditions for increasing knowledge, contributing to a wide exchange of experiences on this issue and improving the preparedness to tackle drought events; NOTES that this process may lead to the setting up of a European Drought Observatory;
22. INVITES the Commission to present a follow-up report in 2008, including deadlines for the implementation of the measures identified in the communication; NOTES that this implementation process should bring together Member States and the Commission to exchange information and best practice and that any legislative initiatives should be based on an in-depth impact assessment; CONSIDERS that the need for further measures, namely on drought risk management, should be assessed taking into account these conclusions, experience gained with the implementation of the WFD, and the results from research and technical activities on WS&D which are currently in progress; INVITES the Commission, on this basis, and taking into account the international dimension, to review and further develop the evolving EU strategy for WS&D by 2012.