

May 2020

The importance of water efficiency and water quality preservation efforts in today's ecosystems

Water is essential for life and is a human right. It is also a vital resource for the economy and it plays a key role in climate regulation. Water is an essential part of the eco-systems which food production depends on, from the field through all the steps in the value chain¹. Water scarcity, climate change and pollution put a threat on these eco-systems.

FoodDrinkEurope believes that the European Green Deal should ensure that water will be further preserved and well managed with its use and reuse made more efficient through smart regulation. The protection and sustainable management of water resources (i.e fresh and saltwater ecosystems, drinkable water and water used to produce goods, including food and drink products) should be fostered by Member States and public/private sectors. This will greatly contribute to help mitigate climate change related risks, preserving biodiversity and achieving towards more sustainable food systems².

The food and drink industry has long been committed to protect water in its extended value chain. As part of our efforts to achieve more sustainable food systems, we will step up initiatives on water in the agri-supply chain and in manufacturing processes with a major focus on risk areas based on data from reliable sources³

We therefore welcome the Commission's proposal in the context of the EU Green Deal, to further stimulate a more efficient and circular use of fresh water, through facilitating water reuse and efficiency in agriculture and industrial processes. We also support the ambition of the Water Framework Directive (WFD)⁴ to protect and enhance the status of water quality and aquatic ecosystems, alongside promoting sustainable water use and management across Europe. To this end, adequate implementation of this directive needs to be ensured. This is necessary for a common understanding of the definitions/requirements while avoiding misinterpretation.

Moreover, we believe it essential to contribute to the overall ambition of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Target 6 on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. We should also highlight interlinkages with other goals and targets (i.e. SDGs 12, 13 and 15) across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This applies, for example, to extended value chains of the food and drink sector outside the Union, that may already have a significant potential impact on local watersheds worldwide.

We call on policy-makers to:

- Ensure that the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy safeguard essential eco-system services protected and ensured by water regulation. This should be complementary to climate regulation and soil fertility;

¹ 'The importance of sustainable water management' (FAO) <http://www.fao.org/land-water/water/en/>

² 'The path to sustainable food systems' (FoodDrinkEurope) https://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications_documents/FoodDrinkEurope_-_The_path_towards_Sustainable_Food_Systems.pdf

³ The World Resource Institute (WRI) - Water <https://www.wri.org/our-work/topics/water>

⁴ 'Water Framework Directive' (WFD) (Commission) - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32000L0060>

- Alongside strengthening the implementation and enforcement of the WFD at national level, facilitate and encourage harmonised national, sector-wide and company guidance on effective water management practices and develop strategies to support actors adapt to the conditions laid down in the WFD the WFD;
- Further explore emerging challenges such as climate change, water scarcity and pollutants (especially pesticides residues) in line with the WFD;
- Embed the principles of the WFD in future Green Deal-related initiatives including follow-up actions to the Climate Law⁵, the 2030 Biodiversity strategy and the zero-pollution action plan, and vice versa;
- Ensure that a post-2020 EU Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe will adequately consider effective and fair water pricing and water efficiency targets. This should be coupled with ongoing trends with regards to sustainable production and consumption and the new Circular Economy Action Plan⁶;
- Put forward a Farm to Fork strategy which supports a regulatory framework encouraging efficient use of water and harmonised practices in agriculture and in the food and drink industry while continuing to ensure safety and quality of food products;
- Ensure that this Strategy will also focus on water quality and quantity in agri-watersheds to preserve and restore the resources on which the food system depends. This can only be achieved with consistency with other legislations such as CAP;
- Provide the necessary support to industry for greater water efficiency and quality, including:
 - A clear political and integral framework that takes into account the connections of water with other domains such as climate and economy;
 - Guidance that allows for and stimulates innovative solutions for greater water efficiency, including more cooperation between different actors and types of actors providing and using water;
 - The development of strategies or cross-sectoral solutions to support companies adapt to the framework of the WFD;
 - Multi-Stakeholder platforms encouraging exchanges of best practices and collective learning;
 - Adequate joint action programmes to foster the necessary changes (including financial incentives). This would help raising awareness that joint collective action from public and private parties is essential to solve water related risks;
 - Appropriate monitoring tools including clear objective data on water related risks in order to reach, in a coherent way, the objectives and potential targets of each of the initiatives/strategies mentioned above.

⁵ 'European Climate Law' (Commission) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-regulation-european-climate-law-march-2020_en.pdf

⁶ 'New Circular Economy Action Plan' (Commission) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:9903b325-6388-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1.0017.02/DOC_1&format=PDF