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EU Parliament Adopts Stricter Measures to Safeguard Water Quality and Combat Pollution

August 8, 2023



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On June 27, the European Parliament **proposed amendments** to legislation aimed at reducing pollution in Europe's water bodies covering inland, transitional and coastal surface waters and groundwater, to better protect human health and natural ecosystems. This is part of the implementation of the **European Commission's Zero Pollution Action Plan**.

The proposed amendments to **Directive 2000/60/EC (the Water Framework Directive)**, **Directive 2006/118/EC (the Groundwater Directive)** and **Directive 2008/105/EC (the Environmental Quality Standards Directive)** are aimed at enhancing the existing legislative framework in the following ways :

- **A watch list of harmful chemicals must be established and maintained.** Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) advocated for an expansion of the "watch list" of substances posing a "significant risk to human health and the environment," requesting that the list be updated to keep pace new scientific evidence and chemicals. Currently 53 substances are covered in legislation addressing surface water, including pesticides, industrial chemicals and metals. The proposed amendments would add another 23 individual substances to this list, including microplastics, antimicrobial resistant microorganisms, selected antimicrobial resistance genes, and potentially sulfates, xanthates, and non-relevant pesticide metabolites.
- **Threshold values are to be ten-times lower for groundwater than for surface water.** PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), types of chemicals that resist grease, oil, water, and heat and do not break down in the environment, were detected in more than 70% of EU

groundwater measuring points. MEPs called for a subset of PFAS and total concentration of PFAS to be included as groundwater pollutants. Further, MEPs called for threshold values applicable to groundwater to be “ten times lower” than those set for surface water.

- **Financial responsibility will be imposed upon polluters.** The financial burden of detecting and monitoring polluting chemicals is currently borne by the Member States. MEPs called on the Commission to consider establishing an “extended producer responsibility mechanism” to ensure that the producers of polluting products pay for the costs of detecting and monitoring such chemicals.

The new measures fall under the European Green Deal and were originally **proposed by the European Commission** in October 2022. Once the European Council adopts its position, consultations will begin with Member States to finalize the form of the amended law.

“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,” said rapporteur Milan Brglez.

Taking the Temperature: As we reported previously, the EU Climate Law 2021 made the targets of the European Green Deal legally binding. EU legislators have since advanced their efforts to translate these obligations into tangible regulation that keep up-to-date with scientific developments relating to environmental damage and climate change. The proposed amendments tackling water pollution are in line with the **European Green Deal's ambitious target** of achieving zero pollution by 2050. The Zero Pollution Action Plan is one of a number of initiatives under the “Environment and Oceans” pillar of the European Green Deal. **Other initiatives** include the protection and expansion of CO₂-absorbing natural ecosystems known as carbon sinks.