

#### **Towards an EU Water Resilience Strategy**



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#### Various uses, demands, pressures and impacts Water is a cross-cutting issue









# WFD objectives are far from being achieved

Where we were in 2018...

Around 40% of surface waters (rivers, lakes and transitional and coastal waters) are in good ecological status or potential, and only 38 % are in good chemical status.

Good chemical status has been achieved for 74 % of the groundwater area, while 89 % of the area achieved good quantitative status.

Source: EEA (2018) European waters. Assessment of status and pressures 2018



Source: Results are based on WISE-SoW database including data from 24 Member States (EU-28 except Greece, Ireland, Lithuania and Slovenia). Water bodies failing to achieve good status, by RBD; see also Surface water bodies; Ecological status or potential (group) and Surface water bodies failing to achieve good status by RBD.

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European Commission

#### Water scarcity on the rise in Europe

500 1,000 1,500 km





Outside coverage

500 1 000 1 500 km

Source: EEA WAT 001 indicator (2015)

#### Source: EEA WAT 001 indicator (2019)

### European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)



#### Climate risks cascade from one system to another

- Climate change is a risk multiplier that can exacerbate existing risks and crises.
- Cascading climate risks can lead to systemwide challenges affecting whole societies, with vulnerable social groups particularly affected.
- For example, climate change driven megadroughts can lead to water and food insecurity, spread of diseases, disruptions of critical infrastructure, and threats to financial markets and stability.



#### European policy context



#### European Council March 2023

It acknowledged "[...] the need for enhanced EU and global action on water and the importance of a strategic EU approach to water security"

#### June 2024

Strategic Agenda...commits to strengthen water resilience across the Union and invest in cross-border infrastructure also for water

#### European policy context





#### **The European Parliament – Highlights**

- Resolution on droughts in 2022
- 2 plenary discussions on water crisis in 2023



### The call for a EU Blue Deal by the EESC



- Umbrella Opinion "A call for an EU Blue Deal"
- Access to water: tackling water poverty and its implications for social policy
- Sustainable and resilient water infrastructures and distribution networks
- Water-intensive industries and water-efficient technologies
- □ Water scarcity and climate emergency: circular and other solutions for the EU agri- food system in a future "EU Blue Deal"
- □ The economics of an "EU Blue deal"
- □ Water Politics: Between Desertification and Securitization Time for a Blue Diplomacy
- □ Water efficient consumption and **consumer awareness** about their **water footprint**





#### The EU vision for 2050 Water Resilience endorsed by the College

"In 2050, global society will be water resilient, offering water security for all.

This entails the protection and restoration of aquatic ecosystems, and a fair balance between water supply and water demand responding to current needs, including the realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, without compromising the rights of future generations."



### European Water Resilience Strategy

On 18 July 2024, President-elect Ursula von der Leyen presented her <u>Political Guidelines</u> for the next European Commission 2024-2029.

- □ A European Water Resilience Strategy to strengthen water security\*
  - Address water efficiency, water scarcity, pollution and water related risk.
  - Enhance competitive edge of water industry, take a circular economy approach, and digitalise water management, cycles and utilities.
  - □ Facilitate public and private investment in technology and cross-border water infrastructure.
  - Strengthen EU global water leadership.

Pending the confirmation of the new commissioners, no precise date for publishing this Strategy has been set yet.



\*see mission letter to Commissioner-designate Jessika Roswall



# Update on the EU water acquis

#### What the Commission is doing: a water acquis in evolution



Ongoing Assessment of the 3rd River Basin Management Plans and 2nd Flood Risk Management Plans



#### **Upcoming 7th WFD & FD implementation report**

EU Report to Council and Parliament- WFD + FD

#### **SWD-EU Overview**

#### 22 SWD- Country Specific Assessment

20 consultants studies for the 3rd RBMPs 21 consultants studies on the 2<sup>nd</sup> FRMPs 26 consultants studies on the 2<sup>nd</sup> FHRMs

> European Commission

### STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT

Informing the new College

Foundation for the structured dialogue with Member States

Capacity builling of general public

Tools for other Commission DGs





# WFD exemptions beyond 2027

### What is still possible after 2027?

#### • Article 4(4) – time exemption ONLY for natural conditions

- All measures identified and implemented in PREVIOUS cycles
- nature takes more time to recover
- Details (evidence) set out in 4<sup>th</sup> RBMPs
- NO DETERIORATION and review every six years
- Article 4(5) lowered objectives for natural reasons/disproportionate costs
  - All measures identified and implemented in PREVIOUS cycles
  - still insufficient
  - additional measure(s) = unfeasible or disproportionately expensive
  - Details (evidence) set out in 4<sup>th</sup> RBMPs
  - Maximum mitigation and NO DETERIORATION review every 6 years



### What is still possible after 2027? cont'd

- Article 4(6) Temporary deterioration due to natural cause or force majeure
  - Exceptional or not reasonably foreseeable
  - Examples- extreme floods and prolonged droughts; accidents
- Article 4(7) New Sustainable Development Projects
  - New modifications to physical characteristics SW /alterations GW
  - Deteriorating status preventing achievement of good (ecological) status
  - New human sustainable development activities bringing water bodies from high to good status
  - Justification overriding public interest benefits for sustainable human developmen outweigh benefits of achieving good status - maximum mitigation - no better environmental alternatives that are not disproportionately costly – explained in RBMP



### River restoration EU water and nature policies

### Restoring freshwater ecosystems

"Inland waters and freshwater ecosystems show among the highest rates of decline"

"More than 85% of the world's wetlands have been lost – IPBES Global Assessment 2019

"Freshwater species populations suffered an 84% decline" – WWF Living Planet Report 2020





<u>Cause</u>: multiple pressures including **river fragmentation** causing:

- Modification of flow
- Barrier to migration and sediment transport
- Deterioration of habitats

- . . .

#### Impacts on ecosystem services

- Resilience to climate change
- Water supply
- Flood protection
- Recreational activities
- Protection of coastal zones
- Nature protection

. . .



### Fragmentation of European rivers



- 1 million barriers
- one barrier every 2 km
- > 85% of all barriers small
- Many obsolete and not in use



#### Biodiversity strategy for 2030

- Restoration of freshwater ecosystems:
  - Increased efforts to restore freshwater ecosystems and the natural functions of rivers – WFD objectives to be met by 2027
  - 2. Restore at least 25,000km free flowing rivers by 2030
    - Removal of primarily obsolete barriers
    - Restoration of floodplains and wetlands
  - 3. Restore and preserve ecological flows WFD objectives to be met by 2027



Biodiversity Strategy 2030 Barrier Removal for River Restoration





### Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)

Good ecological status

hymo conditions not explicitly defined

• Recognition that some barriers are needed

➤mitigation measures

• River continuity required insofar as necessary to support the achievement of good ecological status

>not necessarily removal of barriers



#### Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

- Protect species and habitat types:
  - Favourable Conservation Status
  - Sufficient habitat, of sufficient quality for habitats and species to flourish
- Include several freshwater habitats:
  - "River, lakes, alluvial and riparian habitats" 32 habitats strongly dependent on their associated water courses



#### **Nature Restoration Law**

**Specific restoration targets** 



# Groups of habitat types (Annex I & II)

- 1. Wetlands (inland & coastal)
- 2. Forests
- 3. Grasslands and other pastoral habitats
- 4. River, lakes, alluvial and riparian habitats
- 5. Heath & scrub
- 6. Rocky and (Coastal) & dunes

- 1. Seagrass beds
- 2. Macroalgal forests
- 3. Shellfish beds
- 4. Maerl beds
- 5. Sponge, coral and coralligenous beds
- 6. Vents and seeps
- 7. Soft sediments (above 1000 meters of depth)



### River connectivity – Art. 9

Identify and remove barriers that prevent the connectivity of surface waters to contribute to...

ightarrow ..the targets for riverine

habitats & ecosystems

 $\rightarrow$  ...the objective of restoring

at least 25 000 km of free-

flowing rivers in the EU by

2030

#### "Components" of the exercise

- 1. Inventory
- 2. Identification of barriers to be removed according to...
- 3. MS plan and timetable set out in National Restoration Plan
- 4. Other measures to complement removal



### Thank you



