

EU Policy

Agreement on New EU Groundwater Directive

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An agreement has been reached on 17th October 2006 between the European Parliament and the Council on the European Commission proposal of 2003 for a new directive to protect ground water from pollution¹. This new groundwater directive stems from the Water Framework Directive of 2000², which aims to ensure good environmental status of all inland waters in the EU. Due to the need to set out detailed provisions, the Commission had asked for groundwater protection to be tackled separately in a 'Daughter Directive'.

Member States will be required to monitor and assess groundwater quality on the basis of common criteria and to identify and reverse any persistent upward trends in groundwater pollution. This new directive sets Community quality standards for groundwater with respect to the important pollutants nitrates and pesticides and creates the framework necessary for setting any further standards in the future. It introduces a mixed regime – on one hand, compliance to quality standards and on the other hand, measures to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants into groundwater (prevention for hazardous substances, limitation for non-hazardous pollutants). The Member States will have to establish some of the groundwater quality standards themselves at the most appropriate level, taking into account into account local or regional conditions (e.g. hydrogeology, nature of topsoil, interactions with associated aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, types of pressures, etc.).

In addition to the Water Framework Directive, the groundwater directive is also related to the Nitrates Directive, the Landfill Directive and the future Soil Framework Directive. Together, these Directives make up a framework which paves the way for improved evaluation of groundwater environmental quality in Europe.

The Council will now produce a final version of the text, integrating a series of EP amendments and compromise texts. The formal adoption is expected in early 2007.

Recent literature:**Water Framework Directive, groundwater pollution, nitrates, pesticides**

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¹ (COM(2003)550)

² 2000/60/EC