



Media Release

Embargo: 29 May 2009, 00:01 GMT

River managers plan a bleak water future for Europe

An ambitious European scheme to fix and safeguard its rivers and secure its water future is at risk of being undermined by poor and inadequate plans for water management prepared by EU countries, a new study by WWF and European Environment Bureau (EEB) has found.

The analysis has found none of the draft plans rates well across a range of water safety, conservation and management measures.

“The European Water Framework Directive when adopted in 2000 was far from perfect but it had the makings of a world-leading vision to change the ways we manage, use and value water at a time when the world’s water future looked much more secure than it does today” said Sergey Moroz, Water Policy Officer at WWF.

Despite increasing water challenges exacerbated by climate change, draft plans developed so far by Member States are generally putting off major and necessary decisions, providing few mechanisms and little funding to achieve “good” status for water bodies.

“These plans don’t create an impression that we are finally departing from the unsustainable practices that led us to the current water crisis” said Pieter de Pous, EEB Water Policy Officer. “For example, it is in the interests of agriculture and industry to become less vulnerable to increasingly insecure water supplies but there is very little in the plans when it comes to reducing their water consumption.”

“*What future for EU’s water?*” expresses particular concerns with increasingly water scarce Italy and Greece where it is unclear whether they are actually planning to finalise strategies that are even remotely comparable to what the rest of Europe is doing.

Some countries like the Netherlands that have lost much of their natural rivers and waters in the past, are now starting initiatives to give rivers more space for flooding and thus improving their ability to face future climate change impacts. The Netherlands also managed to secure funding for river restoration, although the amounts are still inadequate.

“Worrying diverging trends now emerge from Eastern and Southern Europe, like in Czech Republic and Portugal, where rivers continue to be poured into concrete straightjackets for the purpose of navigation, flood defence or hydropower,” said de Pous.

In Portugal up to 10 new dams for hydropower are currently proposed for construction without any adequate consideration of the likelihood that there may not be enough water to run them.

Water pollution remains a serious issue also not sufficiently addressed in the majority of plans and large portions of Europe's waters remain at risk of becoming unavailable or in need of expensive treatment.

Water efficiency measures were particularly poor in most draft plans. A partial exception was France's Loire Bretagne basin where a water efficiency objective is proposed for drinking water supply for rural and urban areas.

"To tackle Europe's water challenges, Member States' plans need to be visionary, abandoning a minimalist approach to implementation and becoming the central plank of efforts to tackle lasting food and energy security, public health and climate challenges" said Moroz.

Public consultation on the draft river plans is set to close at the end of June. EU Member States will have to finalise their water plans by the end of the year and send them to the European Commission.

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Notes to the editors

- The NGO's findings supported by an EC commissioned study which found that few Member States are planning to bring more than 20% of surface waters into good status by 2015. The report is available on: <http://www.ewc2009.eu/EWC2009-conferencedocument.pdf>
- The summary under embargo is available on: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/what_future_for_eus_water_summary.pdf
- The full report under embargo is available on: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/what_future_for_eus_water_full_report.pdf
- This press release and related material are available after embargo time on: www.panda.org/eu