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POSITION PAPER ON WATER SCARCITY AND DROUGHTS

EUWMA, the European Union for Water Management Authorities, represents organisations that have water management, irrigation, drainage and abstraction or pollution licensing as their core responsibilities. In many cases, these organisations will directly be involved in the implementation of any policies with regard to water scarcity and droughts.

EUWMA welcomes the communication of the European Commission on water scarcity and droughts (WS&D). EUWMA values the distinction that has been made between water scarcity, a long term stress on water use related to water availability, and drought, a more short term event mainly due to particular weather conditions. EUWMA supports the initiative of the European Parliament to write a report on the European Commission communication. The involvement of the European Parliament stresses the importance of the sustainable management of the vital resource that water is and its direct links to a large variety of policy areas.

No legislative proposals on water scarcity and droughts

EUWMA expresses that there is a clear added value in coordinated European action with regard to WS&D. However, the issue is not suitable for additional legislative measures. Even though WS&D occur in all parts of Europe, there are very significant regional differences in the way the problems manifest themselves. Although no less important, drought situations in the United Kingdom in the past years can in no way be compared to, for example, the droughts facing large areas of Spain. European WS&D legislation would risk being either too prescriptive and therefore not able to address the local or regional WS&D problems accurately, or would become too general, losing its effects to properly deal with the issues at stake. More over, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is the appropriate legal instrument to deal with WS&D. The WFD river basin management plans provide for the opportunity to include measures to deal with WS&D problems, on a river basin level and tailored its specific circumstances.

Water scarcity and droughts not an excuse not to comply with WFD objectives

Even though dealing with WS&D brings great challenges to deal with pollution (for example, lower water levels result in less dilution of pollution), WFD objectives of bringing Europe's waters in good chemical and ecological status should not be jeopardised. Measures to deal with WS&D need to be taken, but they should not negatively influence WFD ambition levels.

EU water scarcity and droughts actions need a twin-track approach

Relieving water stress as a result of WS&D can to a large extent be addressed by better management of the demand for water. It is, however, essential that demand management initiatives are combined with actions to create a sustainable supply of water, capable of dealing with structural changes in climate and water use.

Demand management: To properly address WS&D, there is need for a coherent and balanced development of policy to manage water demand, including attention for domestic, agricultural and industrial use of water resources. This will require eg. representative water pricing mechanisms, inclusion of WS&D measures in the Common Agricultural Policy and Energy policy, limiting water distribution leakages, improving waste water reuse and consumer awareness programs.

Supply management: To ensure that the use of the available water resources can be maximised in a sustainable way, the functioning of natural catchments and aquifers must be preserved and rechargeable water aquifers are needed. In addition, existing water infrastructure needs to be used efficiently.