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Water: Commission Follow-Up Report on Water Scarcity and Droughts

Summary: The European Commission issued a follow-up report to its 2007 Communication on water scarcity and droughts. The report notes continuing implementation of the water framework Directive as central to objectives, but concrete delivery is still some way off. Progress on land use planning is poor, but inclusion of additional water issues under cross-compliance is a step forward. Overall, some progress is identified, but the main challenges remain for all stakeholders on this issue.

Keywords: Water Scarcity; Droughts

The European Commission published a Communication on water scarcity and drought in July 2007 (COM(2007) 414) (see IEEP Briefing Note 20 July 2007)¹. It has now published a follow-up report reviewing progress on the key issues that were identified in the Communication ((COM(2008) 875)².

The Commission continues to stress the importance of implementation of the water framework Directive (WFD) as an integrating mechanism to tackle water issues. The adoption of river basin management plans by the end of 2009 will be critical in this regard, but, of course, they are yet to demonstrate progress with water scarcity issues. However, the Commission recognises that ensuring coherence across policy areas is a major governance challenge.

The WFD requirement on water pricing is an important element and the Commission reports action by some Member States, although it is not clear how far this action is a response to the WFD or is pre-existing action. The report does however note increasing use of metering.

The inclusion of water issues within the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions requirements under cross-compliance under the Common Agricultural Policy is viewed as an important step forward. The Commission had rejected further requirements of the WFD as a cross-compliance condition (due to problems identifying what these should be), but it states that this would be considered in the discussion on the CAP post-2013.

The Commission notes some improvements on land-use planning in relation to water scarcity, but overall it concludes that ‘there is currently little evidence that land use challenges are being fully integrated into the water management decisions taken by the Member States’. Urgent action is needed.

The report continues by considering financing options (eg within aspects of the CAP or under climate adaptation). It notes increasing use of different types of drought management plans and increasing technological innovation.

The Commission concludes that progress has been made, but that the key challenges remain and the EU and Member States need to take significant further additional action to tackle the priorities identified in the 2007 Communication which ‘remain valid’.

References

1. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union*, 18 July 2007, Brussels http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/quantity/scarcity_en.htm
2. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Follow up Report to the Communication on water scarcity and droughts in the European Union. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/pdf/com_2008_0875_en.pdf

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