

**STUDY FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY**

IP/A/ENVI/FWC/2006-172/C1/SC5

SIMPLIFICATION OF EUROPEAN WATER POLICIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past few years, extensive work has been done within the scope of the ‘Better Regulation’ Strategy to start and push forward a process of overall simplification of the regulatory environment in the EU.

The water sector was one of the first environmental sectors that was reshaped in the context of the EU better governance activities. In the 1970s and 1980s, European water policy was characterised by a primarily regulatory approach. In the 1990s, with the increasing eutrophication of sea and fresh waters, viewed as the major problem of water pollution within the EU, two new legal instruments were adopted setting strict rules on the treatment of waste water and the use of nitrates in agriculture. In 2000, a Water Framework Directive (WFD) was adopted in order to concentrate, rationalise and standardise, as well as improve the efficiency of European water protection legislation.

The area covered by the WFD extends to all aquatic systems, surface waters (rivers and lakes), groundwater and coastal waters (A Daughter's Directive of WFD is the Groundwater Directive adopted in December 2006). Land ecosystems depending on groundwater are also included in the protection of the quantity of groundwater. Furthermore, water resources are to be managed across national boundaries, following a co-ordinated approach within river catchment areas. The WFD further abolishes and replaces some of the earlier water directives. Besides replacing existing directives, the WFD promotes also other principles to support simplification, by allowing more flexible implementation approaches to achieve a set target and by involving the public. Similar simplification principles were also a central part of the revision of the Bathing Water Directive, which eases the monitoring burden for Member States.

The ideas of better regulation and therewith of simplification also form the basis for implementation processes at EU level. The Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) of the WFD provides such an example. The “Water Information System for Europe” (WISE) also presents opportunities for rationalising the information collected and thus reducing the reporting burden on Member States. As it appears, the simplification process in EU water legislation is well in progress.

Nonetheless, this briefing could identify some further simplification options in this field of European policy. These options refer to the potential of further simplifying and reducing monitoring and reporting requirements, to the elimination of overlaps between certain water policies, to overlaps between water policies and other policies, to the organisational framework of expert networks and finally to options for dealing with water issues not explicitly covered by EU water policy yet (such as intensified scarcity and droughts).

