



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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INFORMATION NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: Delegations
Subject: Water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change
- Council conclusions

Delegations will find annexed the conclusions adopted by the Council (Environment) on the above subject on 11 June 2010.

Water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change

- Council conclusions -

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

1. RECOGNISES that water scarcity and droughts are already a serious problem in many European regions and that the situation is expected to worsen as a consequence of climate change and, if not appropriately addressed, increasing water demand; and HIGHLIGHTS the adverse effects expected in the quality and availability of water resources and the possible negative impact on biodiversity and human health.
2. UNDERLINES the importance of the latest data delivered by the IPCC¹, stating that the areas affected by droughts have “probably”² increased since 1970 and that climate change is expected to magnify regional differences so that a higher frequency and severity of droughts can be expected, particularly in southern Europe.
3. RECALLS that water scarcity and droughts are independent but closely related matters: water scarcity is related to long-term imbalances between water supply and demand and ecosystem needs, while drought, in its different forms, is about a significant temporary reduction compared to long-term average levels of natural water availability such that water availability is insufficient to meet the demands of sustainable human activities and ecosystems.

¹ 4^o Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007).

² The word in quotation marks refer to an expression of uncertainty calibrated in the 4th IPCC assessment report.

4. Also RECALLS that, in its conclusions of 30 October 2007³, the Council invited the Commission to review and further develop the evolving EU Strategy on water scarcity and drought by 2012, and that the Commission report on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive⁴ (WFD) and the EU climate change adaptation framework are also expected by 2012.
5. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the 2012 reviews constitute a unique opportunity for the further development of a common policy framework to integrate water scarcity and extreme events, such as drought, into water resources management.
6. WELCOMES Member States' increasing attention to water scarcity and drought issues as underlined by several workshops, conferences and forums organized across Europe, such as the International Conference on "Water scarcity and drought: the path to climate change adaptation" during the Spanish Presidency in February 2010, which highlighted the increasing public interest and participation in these issues.
7. RECALLS that the White paper "Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action"⁵ establishes a framework to reduce the European Union's vulnerability to the impact of climate change that is intended to complement and support the measures adopted by Member States and international work on climate change adaptation.
8. IS FULLY AWARE of the international aspect of the problem of water scarcity and drought as well as of its inter-linkages with climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation. STRESSES the importance of exchanging experience and best practice both among Member States and with other partners, including in relevant international fora, in order to apply the benefits gained from knowledge acquired in the field of adaptation to water related impacts of climate change.

³ Doc. 13888/07.

⁴ Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

⁵ Doc. 11666/09 - COM (2009) 147 final.

9. RECOGNISES the importance of sustaining healthy and productive ecosystems, which provide many valuable services such as the storage of water, which in turn increases drought resilience and contributes to preventing desertification processes.
10. UNDERLINES that investment in eco-innovation and resource efficiency with respect to water will contribute to employment, balanced and sustainable growth in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy for Jobs and Growth.

Key messages

11. RECOGNISES that in many Member States freshwater availability is likely to decrease, resulting from both natural and anthropogenic causes and that this is one of several important challenges to achieving the objective of good status of water bodies as required by the WFD.
12. STRESSES the need to promote tools and solutions for Member States to cope with water scarcity and hydrological extreme events, such as drought. These tools and solutions could include preventive integrated measures to avoid medium and long-term deterioration of freshwater quality and quantity and to reduce, as far as possible, the risks associated with water scarcity and drought.
13. Also STRESSES, firstly, the importance of integrated planning and sustainable development to address water use, water scarcity and drought, based on the integration of sectoral policies, and, secondly, the importance of territorial planning in the areas traditionally affected by water scarcity and drought.
14. UNDERSCORES that, in order to take decisions and prepare appropriate policy answers to water scarcity and drought, it is necessary to have access to trustworthy data about the temporal and spatial distribution of water scarcity and droughts events, the expected impacts of climate change on water resources and the vulnerability of ecosystems, as well as the associated socio-economic aspects, including the costs and benefits of the different adaptation options.

15. RECALLS that many water bodies in the European Union cross boundaries; that risks and challenges are shared and solutions need to be coordinated, and that transboundary cooperation, including with non-EU countries, has an important role to play in this process.
16. UNDERLINES the importance of respecting the hierarchy of measures to prevent and adapt to water scarcity and droughts as well as the need to promote water efficiency and water demand management through a combination of different tools, such as: water pricing; better irrigation technologies and techniques; water efficiency in buildings, industry, tourism and distribution networks; waste water re-use; awareness-raising campaigns and educational measures; and, where appropriate, small water retention, afforestation and reforestation.
17. RECOGNISES that once possible preventive measures have been explored and proven insufficient, it might be necessary to resort to additional water supply infrastructures, both traditional and alternative, such as desalination or rain water harvesting, carried out under sustainable conditions and in a cost-effective manner; ACKNOWLEDGES that these alternative water supply options might grow in the future due to climate change and the reduction of water availability. In this respect, NOTES that investments in the development of new sustainable technologies for the supply of clean water should be encouraged.
18. UNDERLINES that, although droughts cannot be avoided, their impacts and consequences can be mitigated by planning and drought risk management, and therefore WELCOMES the initiatives to establish a European drought early warning system, which should, through a multi-disciplinary approach, allow forecasting of drought periods in order to launch appropriate programmes of measures at the relevant level to mitigate the situation.
19. SUPPORTS the further development of the European Drought Observatory based on, and closely interlinked with existing EU structures and activities, and tasked to contribute to drought forecasting, assessment and monitoring as well as to the exchange of best practices on this issue between competent authorities, regional associations such as Drought Management Center for South-Eastern Europe (DMCSEE) and relevant stakeholders.

20. RECOGNISES the need to ensure the appropriate use of the EU Solidarity Fund, in accordance with its rules, in situations of prolonged drought and the usefulness of drought management plans in this context; and WELCOMES the inclusion of drought issues in the work programme of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.⁶
21. RECALLS the need to make full use of existing possibilities for EU funding to address water scarcity and water management issues while respecting the water hierarchy.
22. UNDERLINES the importance of the WFD, and especially river basin management plans and their programmes of measures, as basic tools to guarantee the proper water management and WELCOMES the guidelines, such as the WFD guidance document number 24 “River Basin Management in a Changing Climate”, developed under the common implementation strategy.
23. STRESSES that, in some areas, there is a need for drought management plans, making use of common EU indicators and risk maps as well as of common criteria to be developed for such plans.
24. WELCOMES the positive results from the implementation of drought management plans in some Member States and ACKNOWLEDGES that proper planning during recent droughts has allowed successful mitigation of their impacts, especially in terms of water supply and the protection of vulnerable ecosystems.
25. UNDERLINES the importance of the participation of all interested authorities and parties at European Union, national, regional and local levels.
26. EMPHASISES the significant role of public participation for the management of water scarcity and drought, as it enables the public to express and the decision-maker to take account of opinions and concerns, thereby increasing the accountability and transparency of the decision-making process.

⁶ Council Decision 2007/779/EC, Euratom of 8 November 2007 establishing a Community Civil Protection Mechanism.

27. NOTES with interest the announcement in the Commission work programme of an initiative on the water efficiency of buildings; and DRAWS attention to the possibility of harmonizing water consumption standards, for instance through the Eco-design Directive.

Follow-up

28. URGES all Member States at risk of suffering from significant water scarcity or drought situations, including desertification processes, to elaborate water scarcity and drought management plans as appropriate, coordinated and integrated into general planning on water issues defined by the WFD.
29. In this context, INVITES Member States to promote more efficient and sustainable water use in agriculture, in light of the recent "health check" of the common agricultural policy.
30. WELCOMES the opportunity to consider a European water strategy ("Blue-print for Europe's Water"), to be presented by the Commission by 2012 on the basis of a review of the strategy on water scarcity and droughts and the WFD implementation report and in parallel to the EU climate change adaptation framework; and UNDERLINES the need for early consultation with Member States.
31. In this context, INVITES the European Commission to consider the right mix of measures and financial instruments needed to tackle water scarcity and/or drought events and to present relevant proposals if appropriate.