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CLIMATE CHANGE and WATER**

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Disclaimer:

The written text may differ from the actual speech given at the conference on 13 February 2007.

***Introduction***

Water is life!

But what to do when allocation of water across all uses is likely to change? Water is valuable not only for our own domestic uses, but also for its role in supporting aquatic ecosystems and as a factor of production in agriculture, hydropower and other industrial uses. This allocation will have to change, as climate change is happening and it is especially affecting the water cycle.

Yesterday, we heard many speakers on the observed and predicted trends of climate change and on related impacts. I will not add anything new to this if I emphasise that we have enough evidence to act now. Moreover, I would like to highlight that we are talking about a very broad range of impacts on the water cycle. Besides discussing the impacts of floods, droughts and sea level rise further today, we must not forget the predicted changes in water quality and the impacts on the marine environment when discussing the impacts on different sectors. The JRC made some important contributions on climate change and water, being a report to the European Water Directors in 2005 on fresh water and a report on marine waters that has been published recently. The EEA has also published important reports on this.

When I say it is time to act now, I do not mean that we have to start with empty hands on the EU policy field. And that is where my speech will be mainly about:

the framework of an EU adaptation strategy. This concerns both existing legislation and possible ways forward.

It is clear that action should be taken at all levels, from regional to EU level. But as almost 80% of EU territory is covered by international river basin districts and the EU is bordered by marine waters on almost all sides, there is a clear EU dimension to adaptation. Moreover, for many affected water-dependent sectors existing EU policy should be made climate proof. Therefore, we could speak of an 'EU policy framework for adaptation'.

### *Existing and upcoming EU water legislation*

Some powerful tools are already available with regards to EU Water policy, for example the Water Framework Directive. Some others are at the moment being negotiated, such as the Floods Directive and the Marine Strategy Directive. Moreover, the Commission is preparing a Paper on adaptation to climate change and a Communication on water scarcity and droughts. I would like to address these policies in more detail right now.

#### *Water Framework Directive*

In the Water Framework Directive, climate change should be addressed as one of the pressures affecting the water. Other pressures are in most cases currently assessed as more important by Member States than climate change impacts. These pressures are often related to water-dependent sectors like agriculture, navigation or hydropower. This became specifically clear in the environmental analysis Member States had to undertake as part of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The pressures from these so-called non-climatic drivers will in most cases be aggravated by climate change.

The six year management cycle, in which a river basin management plan, including a programme of measures, has to be established, allows Member States to take the effects of climate change into account.

Consideration of climate change impacts in the first cycle will help to reduce the risk of selecting measures in the first river basin management plan, which later may turn out to be less effective. However, in the second river basin management plan –due for 2015- targeted climate change measures should be included as a must. This concerns measures both addressing water quantity and pollution.

No deterioration of water body status is one of the main elements of the environmental objectives of the WFD. However, the assessment methods for good status will have to be further developed in the light of the predicted changes in climatic conditions. It can be assumed that in certain regions, reference conditions for certain types will change. This should be addressed in the six-year planning cycle. A useful instrument to detect these changes is surveillance monitoring, which should have been established by MS by now and which aims to provide information for inter alia the assessment of long-term changes resulting from widespread anthropogenic activity.

The WFD allows for the application of exemptions to the achievement of good status of EU waters. These exemptions can only be used under certain conditions, for example no further deterioration in the status of the affected water body. A temporary deterioration is however allowed for in exceptional circumstances that could not reasonably have been foreseen. And under certain conditions, failure to achieve good status or failure to prevent deterioration of status is allowed for new modifications, such as flood defence measures. Climate change can thus not be inserted in the river basin management plans on an ad hoc basis, but should be dealt with carefully and well-planned. And that is exactly what the WFD offers sufficient tools for.

Moreover, the Water Framework Directive provides a very powerful tool for users to use water resources efficiently: the requirement to establish water pricing policies by 2010. Furthermore, the principle of recovery of the costs of water services has to be taken into account. The fact that water is becoming a scarce resource should hence already be reflected in economic terms by the WFD.

Finally, the WFD establishes strong links to other policy areas, e.g. agriculture and navigation. The integration in the planning processes, which I already advocate for the first river basin management cycle, will have significant potential for improving adaptation strategies.

### *Marine Strategy Directive*

As far as the marine environment is concerned, the EU Marine Strategy and proposed Marine Strategy Directive, will structure marine environment protection in Europe.

Climate was fully taken into consideration in the conception and development of the EU Marine Strategy. The Strategy's main contribution to adaptation will be

through reducing pressures placed on marine ecosystems so that the combined pressures do not push them to a point beyond which they are unable to recover.

The achievement of 'good environmental status' of Europe's marine environment under the Marine Strategy would, as in the case of 'good ecological status' for the Water Framework Directive, create a buffer to cope with the impact of Climate Change on the marine environment. The expression of 'good environmental status' will need to take into account the fact that the initial base line may shift due to climate-induced large scale changes to marine ecosystems. The flexible and adaptive approach of the proposed Marine Directive as well as the reliance on Marine Regions and Sub-Regions as management units should allow for a flexible adaptation to the specific impacts of Climate Change at regional level.

The Marine Strategy will deliver the environmental pillar of a broader, EU Maritime Policy currently under development. The Commission adopted a Maritime Policy Green Paper in June 2006 as a first step towards the development of this new policy. This Green Paper recognises climate change as a major threat, and adaptation to changing coastal risks in Europe is discussed. The Green paper is currently undergoing a consultation process which will end on 30 June 2007.

### *Floods Directive*

Floods are important climate-related hazards that will mostly increase, although changes will vary geographically across Europe. This we can now state with a very high level of confidence, as indicated by the 4<sup>th</sup> IPCC report.

In the view of this, the proposal for the Directive on the assessment and management of floods is both timely and extremely important. The proposal is currently in second reading in European Parliament and Council. It is an instrument where adaptation to climate change is already built in with the 6 year planning cycles. More specific, climate change scenarios and extreme flood events should be taken into account in flood risk management plans.

However, the Council chose a line whereby climate change considerations would not be taken into account until 2018 in the **second** preliminary flood risk assessment. The Commission is very concerned that this could lead to wrong investment decisions taken in the short term, and it sends the **wrong signal** to the citizens who already today are increasingly worried about increased flooding that this will only be considered properly from 2021 onwards. I would urge Member States to reconsider this delay of climate change considerations and start this already now. In fact, it would be foolhardy not to do so.

## *Water Scarcity and Drought*

The issue of Water scarcity and Drought is being addressed by the Commission further to a request of a number of Member States to initiate a European action.

Climate change may – due to different temporal distribution of precipitation – lead to the paradoxical situation that in some places, there will be both floods and droughts.

An in-depth assessment is on-going, identifying the magnitude of the problems linked to water scarcity and drought and the size of the residual gaps in the implementation of EU existing policies. Climate change impacts will be included in this assessment. Based on this analysis, the Commission will consider which further action will be taken to address water scarcity and drought issue at EU level. This will be presented in a Communication in July this year.

A first Interim report, discussed in December 2006 by the European Water Directors, confirms the magnitude of the problems. It clearly demonstrates that drought is an issue affecting a majority of Member States with different degrees of intensity and frequency whereas long term imbalances affect permanently a number of river basins mostly in Southern Europe and in some other parts of Europe. These initial results also indicate that there is room for considerable improvement in the use of the existing EU instruments for addressing water scarcity and drought.

In particular, the available information indicates that there is a considerable potential for water savings in sectors which contribute significantly to structural imbalances. Therefore, even if drought episodes cannot be entirely prevented, human activities can be adapted to decrease their intensity and effects, taking in particular into account the issue of water scarcity. The sectoral efforts to adapt to climate change must therefore include measures that will reduce water consumption. In this respect, water demand management is emerging as a priority at EU level and the Communication on Water Scarcity & Droughts will review options to ensure effective water demand management.

### *Elements for further action at EU level*

From the description of existing and upcoming water policies, it is clear that there will be appropriate tools available to adapt to climate change in water management.

The main question for us is therefore not whether EU water and marine policy is sufficient to address adaptation to climate change, but how can we ensure that they can be implemented in the best possible way.

In the past five years we have experienced that the Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive is a successful and proactive cooperation process in implementing the Water Framework Directive. In the framework of the Common Implementation Strategy we will develop -this year already- a work programme to help factoring climate change into the river basin management plans.

But implementation of existing and upcoming EU water policy is only possible when integrated with other policies. This means we have to work on a common integrated approach including all relevant sectors. Only in this way, we can avoid negative feedbacks due to sectoral measures or due to a lack of action in a particular sector.

One important step to take when developing an integrated approach to adaptation to climate change, is introducing proper water demand management. This means not only facilitating efficient water use in households, but also changing to less water demanding crops, implementing water savings in industries and offering tourist attractive alternatives for unsustainable activities in for example the Mediterranean.

A second important step for an integrated approach is paying the right price for our water. We have heard about the introduction of the 'user pays principle'. This should make anyone aware that water is not there to take out for free, regardless whether the water is taken from a tap, a river or an aquifer.

Furthermore, we really need to properly take into account costs and benefits when discussing adaptation measures. This includes environmental costs of –for example- navigation. Only transparency in costs and benefits will help coping with the costs occurring from adaptation with allocating water resources to the different users.

A fourth issue related to adaptation in an integrated way is making future infrastructure investments climate proof. In spending millions of euros on new investments, we cannot afford spending our money in an unsustainable way. Unfortunately, I see too many examples of unsustainable investments passing by in my daily working life.

A fifth issue we have to keep in mind while discussing adaptation in an integrated way is possible negative feedbacks from mitigation measures. For example, in the energy field, we all agree that we have to turn to green alternatives. This should however not mean that we turn to very water-intensive forms of biomass in water scarce areas. Or to hydropower development without mitigation measures for our very valuable water ecosystems.

To summarise, there are a lot of ingredients in an integrated approach to adaptation to climate change. I am looking forward hearing your suggestions and opinions today and tomorrow. One overall conclusion I already would like to draw at this stage of the conference is that sustainable water management is a prerequisite for adaptation and that we have ample tools to start right now!

And the need to ensure that distribution of water on the basis of historical rights or on a 'first come, first take' basis is discontinued in areas struck by water scarcity and droughts, will be a main issue for water policy in the coming years.

Thank you.