

# WATER IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

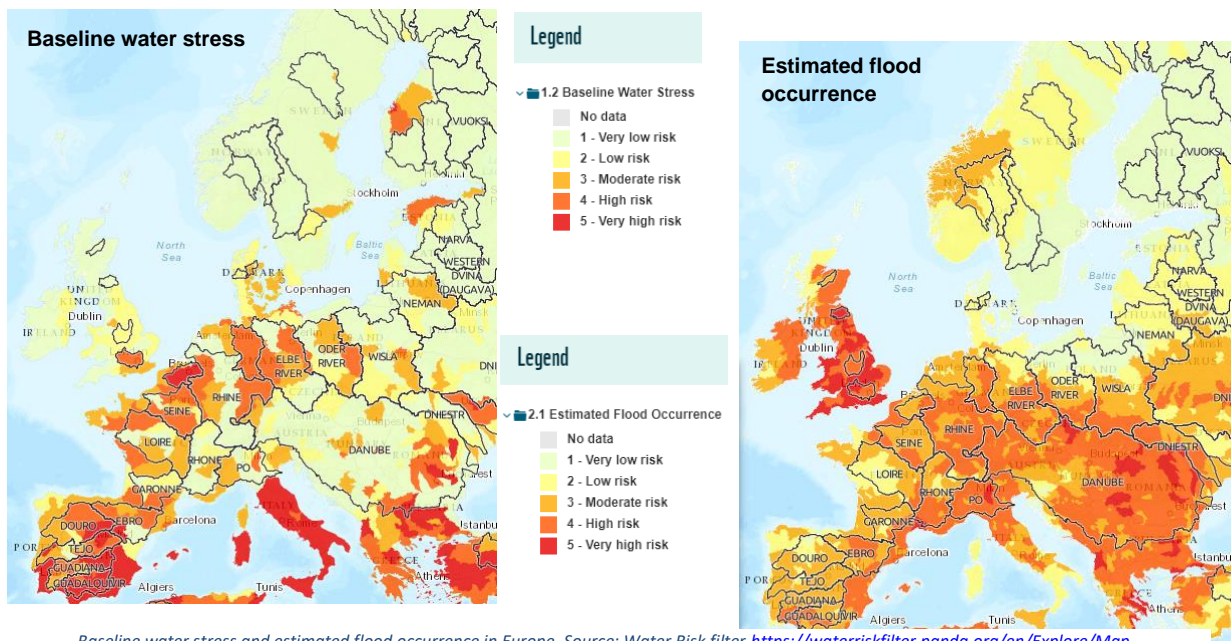
## EXPLANATORY FACTSHEET

### HEALTHY WATER SUPPLY AND WATER ECOSYSTEMS ARE AT RISK IN EUROPE

Freshwater species have declined by **83%** since 1970, equivalent to 4% per year. This is twice more than the decline observed in terrestrial and marine species.<sup>1</sup>

**60%** of surface waters in the EU are not healthy, not reaching a good chemical and ecological status.<sup>2</sup> Groundwaters are in better condition, but still one quarter of them have bad chemical status and 11% of them have bad quantitative status.<sup>3</sup>

Large areas of Europe are vulnerable to water stress and flood occurrences.



Baseline water stress and estimated flood occurrence in Europe. Source: Water Risk filter <https://waterriskfilter.panda.org/en/Explore/Map>

The stakes are high: if we continue to treat Europe's waters in this way, we will be unable to ensure a secure supply of clean water for future generations.

### THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD) – WHAT IS IT?

Europe's water sources are currently protected under extensive and cohesive legislation: the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Under these laws, EU Member States have legally committed to maintain and return **100%** of their water bodies, including groundwater, to good health by **2027** at the latest.

These laws are strong and ambitious, successfully balancing environmental, social and economic requirements. However, many Member States have failed to implement them, which has had, and will continue to have, negative consequences for our water sources. Indeed, it has already resulted in the WFD's initial objective of achieving good status for all EU waters by 2015 being missed by a long shot.

The WFD is currently undergoing a review to establish whether the laws are still fit for purpose, and, in 2020, the European Commission will indicate whether they will be changed or not. It is crucial that we use this opportunity to ensure that our water resources continue to be protected through the strong regulatory framework provided by the WFD.

<sup>1</sup> WWF [Living Planet report](#), 2018

<sup>2</sup> European Environmental Agency, [European waters: assessment of status and pressures](#), 2018

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD) IS ESSENTIAL TO MITIGATE WATER RISKS FOR BUSINESSES

The WFD takes a holistic approach of setting defining requirements for both water quantity and quality, integrating all parts of the wider environment and as well as economic and social systems, and allocating responsibilities for water users. The governance system set by the WFD is crucial to:

- Mitigate the risks of depleting aquifers. In 2050, environmental flow limits will be reached for approximately **42 to 79 %** of the watersheds in which there is groundwater pumping worldwide, mainly because of excessive water abstraction.<sup>4</sup>
- Mitigate the risks of freshwater pollution, with devastating effects on the drinking water supply and freshwater biodiversity.
- Mitigate the climate change impacts on water, as healthy freshwater bodies are more resilient to climate change impacts.
- Make strategic and informed planning at basin level, as the WFD monitoring enables to have consistent datasets on river basins' status.

The costs of not implementing the water related environmental acquis and achieving its objectives would result in annual costs in the range of **5-20 billion €**.<sup>5</sup> This is because of the multiple social, public health, and cultural benefits of having healthy freshwater ecosystems.

When implemented, the Directive, since 2000, has led to some positive results:

- A substantial decrease in pollution with harmful substances, such as cadmium, lead and nickel: **943** water bodies improved in the status of those three parameters during the first planning cycle (2009-2015), even though 2,137 continue to fail to achieve the good status.<sup>6</sup>
- An improvement in groundwater quantitative status by about **5 %** since the first planning cycle. This is significant given that groundwater aquifers provide around 42 % of the total water abstraction in Europe, and about 50 % of drinking water.<sup>7</sup>

However, **53%** of water bodies are covered by at least one exemption to the WFD. An increased focus on enforcement is needed to make sure the WFD delivers its full potential.

For further improvements in water quality and quantity, and the preparedness for water extreme events to be achieved, implementation needs a new impetus in Member States and from the European Commission, not changes to the policy design. Acknowledging the holistic and systemic intent of the Directive is required in its implementation, for it to deliver its full potential.

## A TIME FOR BUSINESSES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENS TO HAVE THEIR SAY

375,000 citizens have stood up for a strong WFD during the public consultation organised by the European Commission in 2018-2019. This made it one of the public consultations with the highest response rate.<sup>8</sup>

With the aim of ensuring that the strong EU laws protecting our water sources remain intact, your company could sign up the statement "WATER IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS" highlighting the need for a strong regulatory framework in the form of the WFD. This statement would include companies' logos only.

To find out more about our work on freshwater and the WFD, please read: [The EU Water Framework Directive – Fit for purpose](#), the assessment made by the Living Rivers Europe NGO coalition.

<sup>4</sup> De Graaf et. al, [Environmental flow limits to global groundwater pumping](#), Nature, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, [The costs of not implementing the environmental acquis](#), Final report, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> European Environmental Agency, [European waters: assessment of status and pressures](#), 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.livingrivers.eu/>