

WATER IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

We, the undersigned businesses, stand with the 375,000 European citizens who have urged the EU governments and the European Commission to preserve the European Union's groundbreaking Water Framework Directive in its current form, as advocated by the #ProtectWater campaign. The Water Framework Directive is the key law to ensuring that freshwater ecosystems in Europe are protected and restored and water is sustainably managed, fully supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This law has provided a stable regulatory framework and has encouraged collective water stewardship action in river basins across the EU.

Freshwater is a unique resource that is not only key to Europe's stability, prosperity, and peace, but is also essential for businesses to operate and nature to thrive. The coronavirus pandemic has put a strain on many of our societies and activities, reinforcing, amongst other things, our utter dependence on our natural world, including water. As a hygienic element, an indispensable part of economic activity, and a primary element of our landscapes and ecosystems, water is a vital natural resource we need to protect and secure access for everyone.

The need to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems, the source of our water, and to seize the potential of sustainable and efficient management of water, has never been greater. There has been an alarming 83% decline in freshwater species since 1970¹, millions of people are at risk globally from water scarcity and pollution², and billions of euros are being lost by investors, companies and municipalities from water risks.³ Europe is not exempt from that trend: as an example, more than 10 million people live in areas at risk of extreme floods along the Rhine only, and the potential damage from floods in this region amounts to €165 billion.⁴

The drought experienced in Europe last summer has shown how vulnerable our ecosystems, food systems and economic activities are to climate change. Floods, forest fires, water stress will only increase in the future, with large impacts on businesses as well. Only sound water management and protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystem can reduce those risks.

¹ WWF Living Planet

² World Bank

³ WEF

⁴ European Commission

However, only 40% of European rivers, lakes, and wetlands are currently healthy and fully provide the ecosystem services we all depend on.⁵ Despite the efforts made by governments, businesses, and communities, a lot of work remains to be done in order to protect and restore all European waters by 2027 as mandated by the EU's Water Framework Directive.

The EU water law offers significant opportunities for business ranging from world-leading innovation in water technology, to 26% of the EU's value added generated by economic sectors that are highly dependent on water in sufficient quantity and/or quality. These same sectors also provide 44 million jobs.⁶

Since the adoption of the Water Framework Directive in 2000, the EU has had a set of rules for the protection and promotion of sustainable water management of surface waters and groundwater. It has served as a stable regulatory framework that improves governance including for businesses, those that depend on clean water as those that need the social and environmental stability that healthy rivers provide. Because the directive distributes responsibilities among water users and promotes public and stakeholder involvement in water management, it has encouraged business mobilization around collective action in the river basins and engagement in water governance to deliver effective river basin planning and real improvements for the water environment. It has helped collect data on the situation of river basins across Europe which enable companies to better scope and plan their activities.

The governance model provided by the Water Framework Directive has inspired several countries beyond Europe, such as India and China, to adopt similar principles in their legislation. To maintain its credibility globally, the EU cannot weaken the current legal requirements and needs to ensure its objectives are met for the benefits of people and nature.

⁵ European Environmental Agency

⁶ European Commission Blue 2 study

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