Reply to the public consultation on Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

Water Europe (WE) is the voice and promoter of water-related innovation and RTD in Europe. WE is a membership-based multi-stakeholder organisation representing over 200 members from academia, technology providers, water users, water service providers, civil society, and public authorities. WE activities and positions are guided by its Water Vision "The Value of Water: Towards a Future-Proof European Water-Smart Society".

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The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD) has overall been very successful in significantly improving the scale and quality of waste water treatment in Europe. The UWWTD therefore, serves as an international reference case in the global effort to increase waste water treatment coverage – exemplified by the UN Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.3.1.

However, since the UWWTD was adopted more than 25 years ago, several developments have taken place that provide both threats and opportunities in relation to waste water. The need to emphasise the value of water becomes especially clear, when we look at the emerging challenges over the upcoming decades they include amongst others:

- ever more frequent and intense droughts and floods,
- the rise of new pollutants,
- increasing water scarcity,
- the need to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.

At the same time a number of societal changes of taken place such as the development towards a circular economy, the emerging Internet of Things, and new technological developments, particularly in relation to waste water treatment that can have an impact on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and consistency of the UWWTD.

A well-designed UWWTD that puts the rights drivers and incentives in place, can greatly contribute to realising a 'European Water-Smart Society' (Cfr: WssTP Water Vision) that:

1. Reduces the impact of European society on our natural water resources by 50% by 2030,
2. Delivers the true value of water for our society, the economy and the environment,

3. Boosts the European water market as well as the global competitiveness of European water industries,
4. Secures society's long-term resilience, stability, sustainability and security regarding water.

SYNERGIES WITH OTHER OBJECTIVES:

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

As already described by the European Commission in the "EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy", water is an important element in the circular economy. The imminent and growing challenge of water stress, already affecting at least 11% of the European population and 17% of EU territory, significantly increase the need to reuse water, including from treated waste water.

The Value of Water can be further boosted by turning waste water treatment installations into waste water refineries that capture and exploit the Value IN water, e.g. nutrients, minerals, metals and energy in waste water, which currently remains unexploited.

GROWTH AND JOBS

The waste water management sector already represents more than 600,000 jobs in the EU , and as the interest from key export markets like India (India-EU Water Partnership) and China (China Europe Water Platform) indicates the export potential is significant. By showcasing how waste water can move from being a burden to becoming an asset, the UWWTD can support significant export potential for the European water sector. Clearly to capture these opportunities innovations will be needed in the water market.

DIGITAL AGENDA

In line with the Internet of Things, or Internet of Everything concept also the water sector may be expected to be digitalised to a much higher extent, by deploying large number of sensors throughout the water network, up to the individual user will produce large amounts of data. Proper use of the data can enable water actors to better govern and manage used water.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on new societal and technological developments, and potential synergies described above, WssTP recommends that the following elements are included in the evaluation:

- The development of the circular economy including the potential for reuse and recycling of water and to capture the value in water (e.g. nutrients, minerals, metals and energy),

- Encourage the use and implementation of new and innovative technologies, and business and governance models,
- The opportunities offered by a further digitalization of the water sector.

To deepen the above cited topics, please read our Vision and SIRA.

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