

Dear Mr. Dantin, dear Mr. Bascou, dear members of the European Parliament, dear colleagues,

I'm very pleased to be here this morning to give you the water operators' point of view on the sustainable management of water in agriculture.

My name is Claudia Castell-Exner, and I am the Vice President of EurEau.

EurEau has been the voice of Europe's water sector since our foundation in 1975.

We represent drinking and waste water service providers from 29 countries, from both the private and the public sectors.

It is a water suppliers duty to provide customers at all times with drinking water of excellent quality and in sufficient quantity.

From our point of view, it is high time for integrated thinking on water and agriculture, since these two vital sectors are closely interlinked.

And I tell you why.

Water is essential for life.

Groundwater and surface water are major elements of the water cycle. They are crucial resources for the supply of safe drinking water, now and for future generations. In this context water services must have access to reliable sources that are protected from contamination.

Agriculture is also essential for life.

Without a safe, secure and affordable supply of food, society cannot and will not function. And without a reliable source of water, agriculture cannot be sustainable.

We see: water and agriculture are strongly linked, and both sectors operate with direct benefits to and impacts on each other.

However, we can also see the evident impact of agriculture on drinking water resources. Consequently, the availability of water that can be used as drinking water without treatment is affected.

The European Commission's efforts from DG Environment and DG Agriculture are very welcome. It is a first step and of course an important step.

In its work, the Commission should consider the whole set of policies related to water and to agriculture, namely:

- the Common Agricultural Policy
- the Nitrates Directive
- the Water Framework Directive
- the Pesticides Regulation and
- the Drinking Water Directive.

These policies need - from EurEau's point of view more consistency, coherence and a proper implementation at Member State level to address and resolve the impact of agriculture on drinking water resources.

One overarching objective when interlinking these policies should be the efficient protection of water resources.

We need in this context a proper and robust evaluation of these policies to create the water-agriculture-nexus.

Let me address a weakness of the Water Framework Directive to illustrate the necessity for evaluation from the water utilities point of view.

Article 7(2) requires that Member States ensure that water bodies meet the requirements of the DWD. Article 7(3) asks Member States to ensure the necessary protection for water bodies with the aim to reduce the level of water treatment for the production of drinking water.

From our point of view, these requirements have been overlooked by the majority of Member States.

We can see this in the lack of measures taken to achieve the necessary protection of drinking water resources when analysing the programme of measures under the Water Framework Directive.

Member States very often consider collaboration projects between farmers and water utilities as being sufficient measures to tackle the impact of agriculture on drinking water resources.

First of all, these cooperation's are voluntary.

They try to overcome the inconsistencies between what is allowed according to agricultural legislation and what is needed to protect drinking water resources.

Some of these cooperation's have been in place for 30 years, some with disappointing results.

This had led to water operators to look for alternative sources but in the future, additional treatment will be a reality if things don't change. This will be reflected for each of us, in our water bill.

In its review of the Water Framework Directive, the EU should take the opportunity to reword article 7 (2) and (3) to make it more ambitious and guide Member States to what is expected.

Let me conclude.

Water is essential for life.

Agriculture is also essential for life.

The whole set of policies related to water and agriculture has to be considered and further developed to create the water and agriculture nexus.

The main overarching objective in this process of creating more consistency and coherence has to be an efficient protection of water resources.

We need integrated thinking and acting.

EurEau is open-minded and offer its support.

Thank you very much for your attention.