

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

2008/2074(INI)

25.6.2008

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union
(2008/2074(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas agriculture, as a productive sector, suffers acutely from the effects of water scarcity and drought, while at the same time playing an important role in the sustainable management of available water resources,
 - B. whereas water scarcity and drought are not equally acute in all regions of the EU, their being most acute in the more southerly Member States,
 - C. whereas water scarcity and droughts are a significant factor in pushing up the prices of agricultural raw materials, and bearing in mind the need to guarantee a stable food supply,
 - D. whereas large amounts of water are required in agriculture and, as it therefore depends on water supply, agriculture must be included as a responsible actor in integrated regional water management systems as regards balanced use of water, stopping water wastage, adapted landscape and crop-planning as well as protection of water from pollution,
 - E. whereas multifunctional agriculture in the EU plays an important role in the preservation of landscapes, biodiversity and clean water and therefore needs financial support for certain measures as well as scientific advice on water management,
 - F. whereas drought is also a contributory factor in the proliferation of certain phytosanitary pests, resulting in substantially lower harvests,
- 1. Advocates more support from the European Union to improve water management on farmland and on livestock farms by providing incentives for the introduction of more water-saving and water efficient installations and irrigation systems; calls on the Commission to boost research, development and innovation as part of the Seventh Framework Programme, with particular regard to areas affected to a greater extent by water scarcity and drought and taking into account biotechnological developments; calls likewise for the increased development of crops which are resistant to drought;
 - 2. Highlights the contribution made by European farmers to combating soil erosion and desertification and seeks recognition of the pivotal role played by European producers in preserving plant cover in regions affected by persistent drought or threatened by wind-blown sand; emphasises the specific benefits of permanent crops, orchards and vineyards, grassland, pasture and forestry for water collection;
 - 3. Stresses the importance of the issue of water management in mountain areas and calls on the Commission to encourage local and regional authorities to develop a sense of solidarity between downstream and upstream users;
 - 4. Takes the view that the environmental value of forests and agricultural production must

be reassessed in a context of climate changes where it is absolutely vital to balance the increase in greenhouse gas emissions with an increase in forest cover, whose contribution as a carbon sink must be taken into account in all policies on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;

5. Takes the view that water must remain a public good and a fundamental element of countries' sovereignty which should be accessible to everyone at fair 'social and environmental prices', taking particular account of the specific situation of each country and the various farming systems in existence, as well as the social role played by farming;
6. States that water management policies that are primarily based on the 'consumer pays' principle are condemned to failure unless they are accompanied by the better use of water resources, starting with measures to put an end to the significant losses that occur in the distribution systems as a result of defective equipment; asks that water 'pricing' does not jeopardise the viability of farms that are needed to ensure the self-sufficiency of supply in the European Union;
7. Considers it necessary, where a watercourse passes through more than one Member State, to introduce inter-regional and trans-national cooperation for the integrated management of watercourses, particularly in relation to farming;
8. Considers it necessary to promote information, awareness and training campaigns for producers in order to make an active contribution towards the sustainable management of water resources;
9. Considers that, in view of climate change and the prospect of worsening drought, there is a need to set up a European observatory that, amongst other things, will allow for the better planning of agricultural activity, so that farmers can adopt those measures best suited to maintaining their output;
10. Underlines the importance of soil rich in humus, an adapted crop rotation system and a balanced mix of forest, grassland and crop land for sustainable water management; warns that the increasing consumption of land constitutes a threat to agriculture, security of food supply and sustainable water management;
11. Urges the Commission and Council to take account of the need to create aid mechanisms for farmers affected by cyclical droughts, fires and water scarcity aimed at preventing fresh large-scale disasters resulting from climate changes and minimising their consequences;
12. Calls on the Commission to support the Member States in reforesting areas which have been affected by cyclical drought and fires on the basis of respect for their bio-climate and ecological characteristics, and hopes that rehabilitation of the rural and urban landscape will be treated as a matter of particular importance, having due regard to specific local features;
13. Underlines the role that environmental programmes in the framework of the second pillar of the CAP play in the setting of incentives for agricultural practices for protecting the

sustainability and purity of water resources;

14. Urges the Commission and Council to create a public system of agricultural insurance, financed by the EU, with a view to guaranteeing a minimum income for farmers in the event of natural disasters such as drought, fire and floods, and to protect them from risks and crises such as those that recently occurred in the countries of southern Europe;
15. Stresses the need to develop policies for the effective prevention of forest fires, reaffirming that the Commission must support the Member States in monitoring and preventing fires, funding, in particular, appropriate forest fire prevention measures such as fire breaks, forest tracks, access points, water points and forest management programmes;
16. Takes the view that water scarcity and cyclical droughts have accentuated the scourge of fires and their gravity, increasing the fragility and risk of destruction of many species that are characteristic of forests in southern European countries, for which forests often represent the main natural resource;
17. Deplores the lack of vision displayed by the Heads of State and Government of the Member States in deciding to reduce funding for rural development and notes that the resources allocated under the second pillar are too limited to deal with the new challenges posed by climate change; suggest that in its forthcoming White Paper on adaptation to climate change the Commission look into setting up a specific fund to finance preventive action, for the benefit of all sectors of the economy affected, including agriculture.
18. Stresses that the revision of Community budget priorities should accord a higher ranking to environmental measures and, in particular, to policies designed to combat the effects of climate change, which include drought and water scarcity, ensuring that the necessary additional resources are available;
19. Stresses that planning for the European agricultural model should take account of the most frequent and acute environmental hazards as well as water scarcity and drought and that, in that context, an effective crisis management mechanism should constitute a fundamental element of the European common agricultural policy.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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| Date adopted | 25.6.2008 |
| Result of final vote | +: 35 -: 2 0: 1 |
| Members present for the final vote | Vincenzo Aita, Bernadette Bourzai, Niels Busk, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, Giuseppe Castiglione, Albert Deß, Gintaras Didžiokas, Michl Ebner, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Ioannis Gklavakis, Lutz Goepel, Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf, Esther Herranz García, Lily Jacobs, Elisabeth Jeggel, Heinz Kindermann, Stéphane Le Foll, Véronique Mathieu, Mairead McGuinness, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, James Nicholson, Neil Parish, María Isabel Salinas García, Agnes Schierhuber, Willem Schuth, Czesław Adam Siekierski, Alyn Smith, Petya Stavreva, Witold Tomczak, Donato Tommaso Veraldi, Janusz Wojciechowski, Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski |
| Substitute(s) present for the final vote | Katerina Batzeli, Ilda Figueiredo, Wiesław Stefan Kuc, Astrid Lulling, Maria Petre, Brian Simpson |
| Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote | Paulo Casaca |