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*Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development  
The Chair*

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3.5.2023

Mr Pascal Canfin  
Chair  
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

IPOL-COM-AGRI D(2023)16067

Subject: Opinion on the Proposal for a Directive concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast) ((COM(2022)0541 – C9-0363/2023 – 2022/0345(COD))

Dear Mr Canfin,

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural development has been authorised to draw up an opinion to your committee, under Rule 56, on the Commission proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast) (COM (2022) 541 - 2022/0345 (COD)).

The AGRI committee has decided to submit its opinion in the form of a letter and nominated its Member Jan Huitema as rapporteur. His draft opinion was discussed and agreed with the AGRI Shadow rapporteurs, and was put to the vote and adopted during the AGRI committee meeting of 23 May. I was tasked to forward this opinion to you with the present letter.

The rapporteur wishes to highlight the issues outlined below:

The urban wastewater treatment directive affects European agriculture in terms of water and nutrient use. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous from urban wastewater are applied to agricultural land across the Union, most notably in the form of sewage sludge. According to the Commission impact assessment<sup>1</sup> accompanying the proposal, today about half of the sludge is reused in agriculture, while another large part is being incinerated or landfilled representing a clear loss of valuable resources. Simultaneously, some Member States have heavily restricted the use of sludge in agriculture on public health grounds.

Considering that nitrogen and phosphorous are valuable resources for European agriculture, the AGRI Committee welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to set minimum reuse

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<sup>1</sup> <https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Impact%20assessment%20accompanying%20the%20proposal.pdf>

and recycling rates for these nutrients from sludge (Article 20), and urges the ENVI committee to maintain or strengthen these provisions. However, the scope of the minimum reuse and recycling rates should be redirected to wastewater instead of only sewage sludge, to also incentivize nutrient recovery at the source.

At the same time, the European Commission should continue its work on the evaluation on the Sewage Sludge Directive (86/278/EEC) to improve sludge control before its use in agriculture, as well as identify obstacles to the competitiveness of circular nitrogen and phosphorous recovered from sewage sludge and assess measures to address these if appropriate. In particular, the Commission should look at ways to incentivise Member States to enable innovative pathways with co-benefits besides nutrient recovery, such as biochar from sewage sludge pyrolysis. The efficient use of sewage sludge for biogas production, only after the most valuable resources have been extracted for agriculture purposes, should also contribute to the objective of energy neutrality.

Treated wastewater can also be reused for agricultural irrigation. Considering the increasing scarcity of water available for agricultural irrigation in some EU regions and to mitigate the impact of agricultural irrigation on ground-water levels, the AGRI Committee welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to systematically promote the reuse of treated wastewater for this purpose (Article 15).

The availability and quality of both sludge and treated wastewater for agricultural purposes is largely dependent on their pollution levels. The AGRI committee considers it therefore important that the urban wastewater treatment directive sets appropriate requirements to remove pollutants from urban wastewater in order to increase the recovery of sludge and the re-use of treated wastewater, and limit pollution to receiving waters.

I would be grateful if the ENVI committee could take into account the above considerations in view of the adoption of its report on the Commission proposal in question.

Yours sincerely,

Norbert Lins