

**Question for written answer E-000320/2021
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE)

Subject: Addressing the problem of the nutrient load in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea with the updated version of the Directive concerning urban waste water treatment

The Commission has evaluated the Directive concerning urban waste water treatment¹ and carried out an impact assessment, on the basis of which the Directive is to be adapted to future needs. The Directive has helped to reduce the biological oxygen demand of treated waste water and the nitrous oxide and phosphorus emissions from it².

Urban waste water continues to be one of the main reasons why many bodies of water do not achieve the good status referred to in³ the Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. It has proven difficult to achieve good environmental status for the bodies of water referred to in the Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, or for the marine environment as referred to in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive⁴ in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea, because of the nutrient load.

According to Article 5 of the Directive concerning urban waste water treatment, Member States must identify sensitive areas. Discharges of waste water from agglomerations of more than 10 000 p.e. must be subject to more stringent treatment before discharge into sensitive areas. According to Annex II to the Directive, sensitive areas are defined as those water bodies of water which are, for example, found to be eutrophic or where further treatment is necessary to fulfil other Directives.

The coastal areas of the Baltic Sea are defined as sensitive areas. This has not resulted in an improvement to the status of bodies of coastal water. There are several reasons, besides the presence of waste water, for the eutrophication of bodies of water, such as agriculture and the internal load. The treatment of waste water needs to be more stringent to achieve the objectives of the Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In order to achieve this, the Directive concerning urban waste water treatment needs to incorporate a stricter requirement for the stringent treatment of waste water before discharge from catchment areas into coastal waters. This requirement should be more clearly linked to the good status objectives for bodies of water and the marine environment. Furthermore, it must be possible, for example, to limit the extent of flood bypasses and, consequently, the volume of untreated waste water flowing into coastal waters.

How does the Commission intend to address the problem of nutrient load in Baltic coastal waters when the Directive concerning urban waste water treatment is updated? In this connection, how can the definition of sensitive areas and the objectives for good environmental status in the Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive be put to better use?

¹ 91/271/ EEC

² SWD(2019) 700 final, COM(2020) 492 final

³ 2000/60/EC

⁴ 2008/56/EC