
Water reuse for agricultural irrigation: MEPs reach deal with Council

- Water resources in the EU increasingly under pressure
- More water reuse would alleviate stress on freshwater supply
- Legislation sets quality criteria, obligations for reclaimed water operators

Plans to counter water scarcity by facilitating the reuse of treated wastewater for agricultural irrigation were informally agreed upon by Parliament and Council on Monday night.

The new law defines minimum quality standards for reclaimed water to be used for agricultural irrigation as well as risk management measures.

“Through this law, we are setting for the first time harmonised requirements at European level for the re-use of water for agricultural purposes, strengthening the food safety of products marketed within the EU and setting another important milestone towards the transition to a circular economy for water resources. In this way, step by step, we are bringing concrete results for the environment” said lead MEP Simona Bonafè (S&D, IT).

“We could potentially reuse 6.6 billion cubic metres of water by 2025, compared to the current 1.1 billion cubic metres per year. That would require an investment of less than EUR 700 million and would enable us to reuse more than half of the current volume of water coming from EU wastewater treatment plants theoretically available for irrigation, avoiding more than 5% of direct extraction from water bodies and groundwater”, she added.

Reclaimed water (i.e. urban wastewater that has been treated in a reclamation plant) will be used to irrigate food crops, processed food crops and non-food crops. The Commission will have to assess within eight years whether reclaimed water can be used in other ways.

With a view to promoting and encouraging the practice of water reuse and in the meantime, Member States are allowed to use reclaimed water for further purposes, including reuse for industrial, amenity-related and environmental purposes provided that human health, animals and the environment are thoroughly protected.

Next steps

The informal agreement will have to be confirmed by both Parliament and Council in order to become law.

Background

The EU's water resources are increasingly under pressure, leading to water scarcity and quality deterioration. In particular, climate change, unpredictable weather patterns and drought are putting a strain on the availability of freshwater needed for urban development and agriculture.

Ensuring that treated wastewater is more broadly reused could limit extraction from water bodies and groundwater. According to the European Commission, the frequency and intensity of droughts and their environmental and economic impact have drastically increased over the past thirty years.

Water over-abstraction, in particular for agricultural irrigation, but also for industrial use and urban development, is one of the main threats to the EU water environment.

Further information

[Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#)

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[Procedure file](#)

[EP research - Water reuse: setting minimum requirements](#)

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