

# Commission proposal for the “Simplification of administrative burden in environmental legislation”

## EurEau’s comments

**EurEau supports simplification of administrative burden in environmental legislation but would like to stress that simplification should not lead to abandoning the ambition on sustainability and protection of the environment that was at the very heart of the European Green Deal and reaffirmed in the Water Resilience Strategy. Efforts should focus on addressing genuine instances of excessive administrative burdens and refining administrative-related disclosures to ensure that simplification enhances, rather than dilutes, the effectiveness of environmental policies.**

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EurEau notices the Commission’s call for evidence for a legislative proposal for a simplification of administrative burden in environmental legislation, published on 22 July 2025.

EurEau supports the simplification of administrative burden, but would like to stress that simplification should not lead to abandoning the ambition on environmental goals and protection that was at the very heart of the European Green Deal. Efforts should focus on addressing genuine instances of excessive administrative burdens, supporting the acceleration of critical infrastructure investment and refining disclosures to ensure that simplification enhances, rather than dilutes, the effectiveness of environmental policies to allow for a better implementation of EU environmental legislation.

In this regard, EurEau would like to share the following ideas and concerns:

- 1. As a general remark, the main focus in relation to environmental legislation should be on ensuring its implementation.** The need for this was highlighted in the most recent implementation reports of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Nitrates Directive or the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD) and reiterated in the Water Resilience Strategy this year.

Proper implementation of EU legislation is a matter of fairness for European businesses too: discrepancies in implementation create market distortions



between Member States. To ensure a level playing field across the Single Market, all countries should ensure their full compliance with EU law.

"Water quality and quantity are two sides of the same coin, and we must continue working on preventing pollution at source," as the Water Resilience Strategy (WRS) pointed out. Handling problems at the source is more cost-effective for society as a whole than relying primarily on end-of-pipe treatment.

"Action must be stepped up," the WRS adds, "and focus on preventing unsustainable land use and management as well as hydro-morphological changes, structural mismanagement of water due to both legal and illegal over-abstraction, inefficiencies in water use across sectors, and water pollution linked to activities such as agriculture, industrial production, mining and waste management. [...]"

"Urgent action is particularly needed to tackle pollutants which pose a risk to our vital sources of drinking water. Highly persistent pollutants, such as PFAS, keep accumulating across EU waters and cause health impacts estimated to range between EUR 52 and 84 billion annually." This and other water pollution must be tackled at source in line with the Zero Pollution Action Plan.

## **2. Discontinuation of the SCIP (substances of concern in products) database under the Waste Framework Directive**

The European Commission committed to better protecting citizens and the environment and boosting innovation for safe and sustainable chemicals through the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, as part of the EU's zero pollution ambition. Both are important enablers for the Water Resilience.

However, the latest developments related to chemicals policy under the so-called simplification ambition point in the opposite direction:

- ~ On 26 February, under the Omnibus Simplification Package, a proposal for a Delegated Regulation amending Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2178 was published (now under the scrutiny period). It included amendments to "Appendix C: generic criteria for DNSH to pollution prevention and control regarding use and presence of chemicals", which would allow labelling major investments of companies who use toxic substances in their products as green and sustainable.
- ~ The Chemicals Omnibus Package, released on 8 July, includes measures that will make the use of highly toxic chemicals easier in some everyday consumer products (such as cosmetics and personal care items). Many of these substances will be rinsed off and end up in wastewater/the aquatic environment.

Now, in the Environmental Omnibus Package, we see the intention of putting an end to the SCIP, which is the database that contains information on hazardous substances in products, aiming to improve transparency and promote the safer management of hazardous substances in products and articles throughout their entire lifecycle.



The SCIP allows water operators to access information about hazardous substances in products, facilitating the planning of technologies needed for removal of pollutants both in drinking and wastewater.

The **discontinuation of the SCIP would hinder the knowledge and traceability of hazardous substances in products, discourage the substitution of hazardous substances by safer alternatives** and, therefore, it may **increase the presence of hazardous substances** in waste which may end in water resources and wastewater. This pollution by hazardous substances will prevent water operators from realising their full potential to provide **safe and affordable drinking water** to European citizens and businesses, and to contribute to a **competitive circular economy**, e.g. by using reclaimed water for irrigation in agriculture (according to Regulation (EU) 2020/741).

We therefore **strongly oppose** the discontinuation of the SCIP database.

### **3. Harmonisation of the provisions for authorised representatives for extended producer responsibility (EPR) in each Member State where a producer sells a product falling under EPR rules and on facilitation of EPR reporting.**

The Polluter Pays Principle is enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as one of the fundamental pillars of the environmental policy in the EU. EPR is one of the tools to implement this Principle.

EurEau fully supports the need to harmonise provisions on EPR to allow for an even implementation among Member States.

We also would like to stress that any change leading to a deregulation of EPR would be a clear violation of the polluter-pays principle and would mean putting all the responsibility for environmental protection and pollution remediation on consumers. Protection of the environment should be addressed through co-responsibility and prevention, as stated in the TFEU.

In addition, EPR should incentivise a sustained substitution of polluting substances with safer alternatives. A deregulation of EPR would discourage such substitution.

Furthermore, and in particular, EurEau calls for the protection of the EPR scheme as agreed by the co-legislators in the recast UWWTD, which makes producers of micropollutants (pharmaceutical and cosmetics products producers) responsible for a large part of the financing of the quaternary treatment to remove such micropollutants from urban wastewater. Shifting the financial burden for quaternary treatment from the two main polluting sectors (according to the impacts assessment carried out by the European Commission that accompanied the proposal for the recast UWWTD) to water and wastewater service users, including businesses, could have a strong impact on them.

The European food supply chain is heavily dependent on high quality water and wastewater services offered at competitive prices. Experience shows that food producers in rural areas could be particularly exposed to increased water tariffs,



as costs per m<sup>3</sup> in smaller wastewater treatment plants are higher than in larger plants. According to first estimates, wastewater tariffs could increase in many countries by 15 to 50% depending on the local circumstances. This may affect both food prices and the competitiveness of the European food sector.

EurEau also foresees that the EPR system will promote innovation in the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries, as well as a real technological leap in regard to quaternary wastewater treatment.

For more detail on why EPR should be preserved in the recast UWWTD, see our letter to Commission President von der Leyen [here](#), as well as our letter to Member States in *Annex I* of this document.

#### **4. Streamlining reporting obligations, removing double requirements to report, promoting further digitalisation of reporting in the area of circular economy, industrial emissions and waste management, while maintaining the policy objectives.**

Reporting obligations should be understood as means to an end, not as an end in themselves. Reporting should not only allow to assess compliance and implementation of environmental legislation, but also to better plan and achieve improvement towards environmental goals and contributing to a competitive circular economy.

EurEau supports the principle of simplifying reporting obligations. Efforts should focus on addressing genuine instances of excessive reporting burdens and refining disclosures where the informational value is limited, ensuring that simplification enhances, rather than dilutes, the effectiveness of environmental legislation.

Furthermore, reporting obligations should be harmonised and coherent among different pieces of legislation, to avoid reporting on the same issues and yet in different ways through various pieces of legislation.

With regards to industrial emissions, we would urge the Commission to preserve the carefully balanced compromise achieved by the co-legislators in the recent revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive. In particular, any reform should not remove the requirement to analyse, as part of the Environmental Management System (EMS), the possibilities for substituting hazardous substances with safer alternatives or reducing their use or emissions.

As stressed above, the release of such substances into the environment can have a significant impact on water services' ability to perform their mission in a safe and affordable way. Keeping an accurate inventory of hazardous substances provides an indispensable basis for assessing related risks. But it is also necessary to stop, reduce or substitute the use of these chemicals to bring emissions down and significantly lower the risk of accidental spills during transport or storage.

It should be noted that paragraph 3 in Article 14a of the IED already avoids double reporting in the EMS by allowing a simple reference to existing documents developed under other legislation.



## 5. Addressing permitting challenges relating to environment assessments based on experience recently gained such as under the Net Zero Industry Act.

Simplifying the environmental assessment framework, inspired by the Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA), raises important considerations for the water supply and wastewater treatment sector. In many Member States, much-needed investments to modernise drinking water and wastewater infrastructure have faced sometimes years of delays waiting for a permit.

Accelerating the granting of permits to water and wastewater infrastructure is a key requirement for housing, economic development and public health. We encourage the Commission to draw inspiration from the positive change made in the energy sector by the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III). RED III seeks to streamline and expedite permit-granting procedures by reducing time periods for consents, provides the ability to scope out what level of detail is to go into environmental assessments.

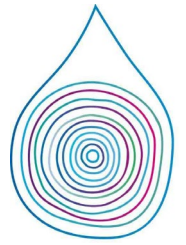
It also requires Member States to ensure that in the permit-granting procedure, the planning, construction and operation of renewable energy plants, their connection to the grid, the related grid itself, and storage assets are presumed as being in the overriding public interest and serving public health and safety when balancing legal interests in individual cases for the purposes of relevant provisions in the Habitats, Birds and Water Framework Directives.

Similar attention and focus needs to be given to water services, which often require multiple layers of consents, with long lead in times.

Streamlining permitting procedures has the potential to reduce the administrative burden on the water sector and enable the timely modernisation of these critical infrastructures to respond to urgent needs such as energy efficiency, resilience against flooding or droughts, or indeed keeping up with population growth in many urban areas. Delays in upgrading water and wastewater infrastructure also risk undermining compliance with recently revised water acquis, as well as the political ambitions set under the Water Resilience Strategy. We would therefore welcome simplification measures aimed at reducing these delays.

In this context, we should also draw attention to the EU Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse (Regulation (EU) 2020/741). While ensuring safety is crucial, the risk assessment requirements under the permitting process are proving extremely demanding and hinder a wider uptake of water reuse for irrigation. Simplifying these procedures, while maintaining safeguards, would greatly support the effective implementation of this relatively new Regulation.

**However, simplification must strike the right balance to avoid creating loopholes for sectors with significant environmental footprints.** If procedural streamlining weakens safeguards under the Water Framework Directive or the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, projects that increase pollution or intensify water abstraction could be fast-tracked without adequate scrutiny. This would shift the burden onto water utilities, which would then face higher treatment costs.



When the NZIA introduced a fast-track procedure, it did so with the understanding that this would apply only to a relatively small number of priority projects and stressed Member States' duty to allocate enough resources to enable competent authorities to manage the additional workload. Applying the same shorter deadlines, without distinction, to *all* projects would likely overwhelm the administrative capacity of these authorities, further increasing the risk of inadequate assessment.

**Any reform should therefore distinguish between those activities where simplification can accelerate water resilience and environmental protection, and those where excessive procedural simplifications would lead to deteriorating environmental impacts.**

## Conclusion

The water sector supports the Commission's intention to streamline permitting procedures and reduce double reporting under EU environmental legislation. However we would urge the Commission to ensure that these simplification efforts do not inadvertently undermine the objectives of the Water Resilience Strategy, the Water Framework Directive, the Zero Pollution ambition and other environmental acquis. Due to the multifaceted impacts that changes to permitting and monitoring requirements can have on water resilience, it would seem appropriate and necessary to conduct an impact assessment before a legislative proposal is made.



## About EurEau

EurEau is the voice of Europe's water sector. We represent 70,000 drinking water and wastewater operators from 33 countries in Europe, from both the private and the public sectors.

Our members are 38 national associations of water services. At EurEau, we bring national water professionals together to agree European water sector positions regarding the management of water quality, resource efficiency and access to water for Europe's citizens and businesses. The EurEau secretariat is based in Brussels.



EurEau



## Annex I

### Joint letter by EurEau and Aqua Publica Europea to EU Member States

Tuesday, 2nd September 2025

**Subject:** Council conclusions on the European Water Resilience Strategy

Dear Ambassador,

The Environment Council is currently drafting conclusions on the recently published European Water Resilience Strategy (EWRS), which are expected to be adopted in October.

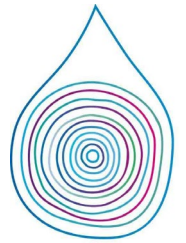
On behalf of European water operators and their national associations, we would like to draw your attention to the European Commission's late inclusion in the EWRS of a commitment to conduct an updated study on the costs and potential impacts of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme in the recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) on the pharmaceutical and cosmetic sectors, which creates uncertainty and risks delaying its implementation.

In a context of ongoing legal challenges and pressures from industries to water down or even suspend this EPR scheme, we believe that it is crucial that Environment Ministers reaffirm their strong support for the polluter-pays principle and we call on you to ensure that the forthcoming Council conclusions uphold the carefully negotiated and balanced compromise agreed by co-legislators during interinstitutional negotiations last year.

The recast UWWTD is a major step forward in protecting public health and water resources in Europe. The EPR scheme is a central element of this legislation, which ensures – for the first time in the water sector – that industries placing on the market products that release micropollutants into water resources contribute to their treatment costs. Without this scheme, these costs would disproportionately fall on regional and local authorities and, ultimately, be passed on to households and SMEs; adding to the financial strain already created by other new provisions in the recast Directive.

The EPR scheme also plays a key role in Europe's competitiveness agenda. By encouraging the design of sustainable products and the substitution of harmful substances with greener alternatives, it creates a competitive advantage for innovative companies. At the same time, by supporting the control-at-source principle, it reduces treatment costs and energy use while advancing the circular economy in improving water reuse and sludge quality, facilitating resource recovery. Since it applies to all companies placing cosmetic and human pharmaceutical products on the EU market, it also prevents environmental dumping between Member States and ensures the proper functioning of the internal market. Furthermore, it protects European companies from unfair competition with non-European companies, as the EPR scheme applies to any pharmaceutical and cosmetics producer who places their products on the EU market.

We remain at your disposal should you require any further information.



## Annex II

### Joint statement by EurEau, the EEB, Hazardous Waste Europe and Zero Waste Europe

#### Joint industry statement

#### *No re-opening of the revised Industrial Emissions Directive and the industrial Emissions Portal Regulation by any omnibus regulation undermining ambition*

Brussels, 04/09/2025

The undersigned multi-stakeholder interest groups from industry<sup>1</sup> request the European Commission to not re-open the Directive 2024/1785 on industrial and livestock rearing emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control)<sup>2</sup> and its related Regulation (EU) 2024/122 on reporting of environmental data from industrial installations<sup>3</sup> as a result of upcoming omnibus, or subsequent simplification initiatives. Such a reopening would risk direct contradiction with, among other policies, the recently adopted Water Resilience Strategy. We:

- support the overall ambition of the IED 2.0 to protect the environment and human health in the most effective and efficient way from the effects of pollution from large agro-industrial installations;
- are committed to preserve the integrity of the co-decision process and consider the compromise reached between the various interest groups as sufficiently balanced. In particular we:
  - Object to the deletion or weakening of provisions related to Transformation Plans (Art 27d)
  - Object to weakening of the provisions related to other aspects of the Environmental Management System (Art 14a), such as the substitution/risk assessment on human health and the environment of use / emissions of hazardous chemicals.
- are committed to contribute to the development of the Best Available Techniques related conclusions and the derivation of meaningful associated emission and performance levels resulting from thorough data collection practices.



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<sup>1</sup> supported by civil society organisation networks such as eeb.org and zerowasteurope.eu

<sup>2</sup> OJEU 15/07/2024

<sup>3</sup> OJEU 02/05/2024