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ESPP input to EU consultation on

Update of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12405-Revision-of-the-Urban-Wastewater-Treatment-Directive

ESPP (European Sustainable Phosphorus Platform) welcomes the overall approach of maintaining the Urban Waste Water Treat Directive, which has proved an effective tool for improving water quality since 1991.

ESPP considers that the UWWTD has been effective in reducing pollution to the environment and in improving water quality, so making an important contribution to environmental protection, to quality of life (clean bathing waters, countryside and leisure activities) with strong economic benefits (reduced drinking water treatment costs, tourism) as well as European world leadership in water treatment know-how and technologies.

ESPP welcomes the consultation proposals to update the Directive in line with **Green Deal circularity and climate objectives**, in particular:

- **improving definition and protection of nutrient "Sensitive Areas"**
- **integrating circularity (reuse and recovery of nutrients and materials from wastewater)**
- **addressing contaminants, in particular by action at source and Extended Producer Responsibility.**

ESPP also underlines that the proposed revision of the UWWTD is intrinsically linked to the Sewage Sludge Directive, for which the evaluation is underway, and to the Commission's proposed INMAP (Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan) under the Circular Economy Action Plan.

Eutrophication

ESPP welcomes the recognition that **eutrophication remains a major issue to be addressed in much of the EU**, with storm overflows and nutrient discharges from agglomerations < 2 000 p.e. and "IAS" (autonomous wastewater treatment, septic tanks) as issues to be addressed. Inadequate treatment of these is currently a significant local contributor to eutrophication and to local surface water quality failures in some places.

We underline that eutrophication problems are being accentuated by climate change, because of increased nutrient runoff from land related to intensive rainfall events, soil dryness and increasing temperature, and also to reduced summer flows in many areas. For a summary of this, see www.phosphorusplatform.eu/Scope137

The **UWWT Directive "Sensitive Areas" should take into account Water Framework Directive Quality Status requirements**: nutrient discharge limits should be tighter than UWWTD general limits, and applicable in smaller agglomerations and/or IAS where this is necessary to achieve WFD objectives.

Circularity

ESPP welcomes the aim to integrate circularity objectives into the UWWTD and suggests that specific reference be made to the Circular Economy Action Plan and **the Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan (INMAP)**. The EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability (Toxic-free EU Environment) should also be taken into account.

In particular, **materials from wastewater should be included as one of the priority streams for development of EU End-of-Waste criteria under the Circular Economy Action Plan**. A joint letter with proposals for this, signed by over one hundred industry federations, public wastewater authorities, companies and research institutes, has been sent to the European Commission and can be seen here www.phosphorusplatform.eu/regulatory

ESPP considers that it should be made clear that nutrient "*recovery objectives*" should include both "recovery" and "reuse" and should consider both phosphorus and nitrogen. It should be emphasised that sewage nutrient reuse, via valorisation of appropriately treated sewage sludge, must be managed to ensure safety (risks from contaminants, antibiotic resistance …) and that "***sludge be used in such a way that account is taken of the nutrient requirements***", as proposed in the Commission's roadmap for the Sewage Sludge Directive. Sewage sludge contains valuable crop nutrients, in particular phosphorus, but over- or mis-application of nutrients is not effective recycling, and can lead to nutrient losses from land. The contribution of sludge use to soil carbon should also be considered.

Micropollutants

ESPP welcomes the proposals to address micropollutants via **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**: pharmaceuticals, microplastics, persistent industrial and consumer chemicals. The UK UKWIR CIP2 studies, for example, identified perfluorinated chemicals (PFAS/PFOS) and fluoranthene, brominated flame retardants, cypermethrin and TBT as priority industrial contaminants (see https://ukwir.org/the-national-chemicalinvestigations-programme-2015-2020-volume-3-wastewater-treatmenttechnology-trials).

However, in addition to EPR, micropollutants should be addressed at source by **banning problematic consumer and industrial chemicals** which are pose risks in wastewater treatment discharge or sewage sludge and are not degraded in treatment. Such industrial and consumer chemicals should urgently be "Restricted" under REACH, that is banned for all applications where not absolutely essential for society (e.g. health, environment applications), with possible exceptions only for 'closed' uses (no losses to wastewater systems, neither directly nor by losses from products in use or at end-of-life).

ESPP strongly welcomes the **Commission proposals to restrict perfluorinated chemicals (PFOS, PFOA),** identified by many stakeholders and scientists as particularly problematic SWD(2020)249 https://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/chemicals/2020/10/SWD_PFAS.pdf under the new "Chemicals Strategy towards a toxic-free environment".

Economic tools

ESPP welcomes the emphasis on polluter-pays, and we suggest that **economic tools should also include emissions trading** for nutrient losses to the environment, in order to optimise costs, subject to ensuring Water Framework Directive Quality objectives.