

**WFD meets CAP –
Opportunities for the future**

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Generalsekretär

Mag. Werner Wutscher

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to have the honour to welcome you in Vienna to this important conference during the Austrian Presidency.

The conference on "Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – Opportunities for the future" is hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management and the European Commission.

The conference is part of the work carried out by the CIS Strategic Steering Group (jointly chaired by the EU Commission and UK DEFRA) and the EU-(RTD) Project CAP&WFD within the 6th Framework Programme, both focussing on the linkages between the Water Framework Directive and agriculture.

The aim of the conference is to provide a forum for an exchange of experience and views on the two policy fields and their future development.

In Austria the two policy fields are combined in one ministry, the Ministry of Life, and this enables me to give a short overview on activities in both fields in our country.

The report on the status assessment of waters, published last year, gave an impressive confirmation of the successful waste water collection and purification in Austria. Organic and chemical pollutants have been removed in large part. The report also highlighted that the predominantly Alpine nature of Austria, the need to protect the population against flooding and the wealth of possibilities in generating sustainable energy through hydraulic power had an impact on the appearance and status of our rivers. Based on the EU criteria slightly over half of the water bodies in the Austrian river network assessed may fail a reaching of the "good ecological status".

With regard to organic pollution and to nutrients the situation is much better with more than 80 % of Austrian rivers reaching good status. This shows that agricultural activity is by far not the only pressure on the water quality. However, reducing diffuse pollution from agriculture still is a challenging task.

While 50 % of the Austrian population is supplied with spring water, approximately 50 % of the Austrian population gets drinking water from groundwater supplies. In certain – fortunately rather small – parts groundwater is polluted by nitrates. This problem is addressed through countermeasures in the farming sector. In combination with the governmental legal measures, supplementary measures are especially important.

For Austria in particular the second pillar of the CAP, the rural development policy plays a very important role and includes a number of measures for improving water quality, such as organic farming (10 % of all farmers apply organic farming), reduced use of fertilisers and pesticides or greening. In 2004 78 % of the Austrian farmers participated in the Austrian Agri- Environmental Programme. Within the ongoing planning process for the next period 2007-2013 additional water quality related measures are considered, e.g. extended buffer zones along rivers being at risk of not reaching good environmental status due to diffuse pollution. The preservation of extensive farming activities in mountain areas is a second cornerstone of the Austrian rural development policy and – among other things – facilitates the maintenance of land management practices that help prevent floods and landslides and has a very important role in the prevention of biodiversity (of extensive meadows).

Farmers can contribute to an improvement of water quality but it is also important to take into account that the agricultural sector is under significant economic pressure. So we need to find solutions which help to reduce detrimental effects of agriculture on the environment without having negative impacts on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

The conference on Water Framework Directive and agriculture here in Vienna under the Austrian Presidency is based on the outcomes of the conference under the UK Presidency of the EU on 20-21 September 2005 in London, and aims at identifying possible synergies in the implementation and financing of the various requirements of the Water Framework Directive and the Common Agricultural Policy.

One of its key objectives is to further strengthen the dialogue between experts, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders in the field of the Water Framework Directive and the Common Agricultural Policy. The outcomes of the conference will be directly integrated in the contents of the policy recommendation papers currently under preparation.

We believe that different experience of each participant on water management, water pricing and agriculture und rural management will be interesting and von importance at this conference to achieve a common and coherent policy recommendations paper.

I want to wish you a successful Conference and some time to enjoy Vienna.

Thanks you very much for your attentions!