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Priorities of the Water Sector

for the Elections of the European Parliament
from June 6th to 9th 2024

The elections for the European Parliament will take place in the Member States from June 6th to 9th, 2024. From the point of view of the German water industry represented by BDEW, the following priorities should be set for the next legislative period:

→ Extended Producer Responsibility

› Waste Water

The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive established the foundation for the Extended Producer Responsibility and thus the implementation of the Polluter-Pays Principle in waste water management. This is a pivotal milestone aiming at the incentivised, market-based prevention of pollutant discharges at source. The final adoption of the directive must now take place as quickly as possible. In addition, the EU Commission must ensure and coordinate national implementation quickly, transparently, unambiguously, and coherently within the Member States.

› Drinking Water

In view of the increasing contamination of drinking water resources with PFAS and other trace substances, the Extended Producer Responsibility based on the Polluter-Pays Principle needs to be implemented for the drinking water industry. The rising costs of drinking water treatment must not be passed on to the general public, who are not the actual cause of the pollution. The financial participation of manufacturers in drinking water treatment costs can create a sustainable incentive to effectively prevent the contamination of water resources at the source.



→ Pragmatic Approach for the PFAS Restriction

BDEW is calling for a pragmatic approach to preventing PFAS from entering the environment directly at source. An extensive ban on PFAS along with appropriate transition periods and exemptions, particularly for applications needed for the energy transition, should be adopted by the European Commission. This also includes the need for financing based on the Polluter-Pays Principle particularly for drinking water treatment services. An implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility through, for example, a fund could be envisaged.

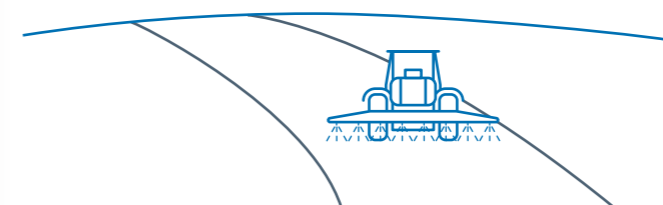
→ Climate resilient Water Supply / Prioritizing Drinking Water

In light of climate change, the drinking water supply in Europe must be organised in a resilient manner. This includes, for example, the expansion and strengthening of infrastructure in numerous regions, as drinking water resources are distributed heterogeneously from region to region in Germany. Measures to accelerate the expansion of drinking water infrastructure – analogous to the expansion of renewable energies – should therefore be adopted on a European level. Furthermore, there is a need for transparency of water extraction by all users in the same way as is already practiced by water supply companies. In water shortage situations, public drinking water supply should be prioritised over other uses.



→ Agricultural Practices conscious of Water Quality and Quantity

In the interests of sustainable and water-compatible agriculture, the EU Nitrates Directive must be implemented consistently in all Member States. The EU Commission should submit a monitoring report on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive and, if necessary, call on the Member States to implement further nitrate reduction measures. Initiatives from the current legislative period, such as the proposed directive on soil monitoring, must be followed up and implemented with appropriate levels of ambition.



→ Recycling of Phosphorous and Sewage Sludge Directive

If the Sewage Sludge Directive is revised in the next European legislative period, the recovery of nutrients from sewage sludge, in particular phosphorus, must be specified in quantitative terms. BDEW will actively participate in this process, keeping the mandatory standards in Germany in mind. As set out in the new Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, a European market for recycled phosphorus has to be created. This requires the introduction of quotas or a purchase obligation as well as its authorisation as a fertiliser. In line with the circular economy, this approach can exploit the full potential of recycled phosphorus.

→ Water Framework Directive

The European Water Framework Directive has contributed to a significant improvement in the status of water bodies throughout Europe, although the target of achieving good status in all European water bodies by 2027 is not achievable. In order to continue to prioritise water protection, which is also necessary for Germany, BDEW considers it imperative to continue the European Water Framework Directive as a modern management instrument for cross-border water protection in an appropriate manner beyond the third management period in 2027. To ensure that the target can be achieved by 2039, Germany has applied a holistic approach to planning, in which all measures necessary to achieve good status have been identified. The aim must be to reach a modernised and reformed follow-up agreement to the Water Framework Directive that keeps the relevant issues of preventing pollutant discharges, adaptation to climate change, dealing with water morphology and other relevant issues permanently at the centre of attention.

→ Carbon Management Strategy

In order to protect groundwater resources, and in view of the correspondingly high population density in Germany and many regions of the European Union as well as the occurrence of certain tectonic and seismic counter-levels, BDEW believes that storage sites for the onshore storage of CO₂ should not be considered. Instead, a CO₂ transport infrastructure to connect to offshore CO₂ storage sites should be developed and implemented at European level.



→ Sustainability Reporting

With the CSRD and Taxonomy, the EU has established and developed a path towards sustainability management for many companies, including those in the water industry. The water industry expressly welcomes the objective of sustainability and the corresponding alignment of business practices. However, BDEW advocates for coherence among these instruments in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy for companies. At the same time, the different achievements already reached in EU Member States to date must be considered and acknowledged within set requirements, such as the Technical Screening Criteria of the Taxonomy.



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