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# A Revolution in Europe: The Water Framework Directive

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*Water: A Key Issue for Sustainable Development – For Johannesburg and Beyond*

National Wildlife Federation & Heinrich Böll Foundation

## The 2000 Revolution in EU Waters

After several years of preparation (open process)

- European Parliament voted in favour,
- Council of Ministers remained silent, and
- Water Framework Directive was adopted by default.

*A **Directive** is a law of the EU that is **binding in its objectives** but leaves **freedom for policy designs** in the Member States; it is an **instruction to all Member States** to initiate policies and legislation.*

## The Nature of Revolutions

- They build on **trends** and **undercurrents**.
- You see them coming: “The writing is on the wall.”
- They succeed when the **forces of old** give up.
- They don’t change much in the short run.

*Much of the Water Framework Directive is good old **common sense**, at least to water managers and others involved in the protection and management of natural water bodies and in water services.*

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 1

**“Good status for all waters by 2015”**

**(Objective of the Water Framework Directive)**

**(or as soon as possible thereafter ...**

**or perhaps never, if you can justify that)**

- **Water bodies** are now at the centre of water policies, and not water uses or functions (**green revolution**).
- The Directive establishes a cyclical management aimed at **continuous improvement** of water bodies.

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 2

**Water Status** (or water quality) **is defined** for all types of waters (rivers, lakes, groundwater, coastal) based on:

- **Biology,**
  - **Chemistry** (pollutants, nutrients, pH, ...),
  - **Morphology.**
- **No Member State previously looked at all 3 combined in water policy and management.**

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 3

### Integrated River Basin Management

(surface, ground and coastal waters, and wetlands)

- Perspective changes from “**lines**” to “**areas**”.
- Focus shifts from **point** to **diffuse sources**.
- Administration moves from **territory** to **bio-regions**.

Will lead to an **overhaul of administrative structures** and procedures.

***But don't underestimate the conservative power of the forces of old.***

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 4

### Integration across sectors

(Environment, Shipping, Power, Public Works ...)

- Conflicts with **agriculture** (irrigation, chemicals)
- Need to focus on **Heavily Modified Water Bodies**
- **Integration across fields of environmental policy**
  - Quantity and quality, morphology and dynamics
- **Integration of Environment and Nature Conservation**

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 5

### Economics:

- **Economic analyses**
- **Cost recovery**; environmental & resource costs
- **Selection of measures** on economic considerations

**Tariff policies** will have environmental components.

**Economists** will enter the water policy community.

***But don't underestimate the conservative power of the forces of old.***



## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 6

### Public participation, not just information

- Committees, commissions etc.
- Hearings and other public events
- Web Sites (visualization with GIS)
- Involvement of stakeholders (water users & public interests)

Will open up decision-making in a **classic technocracy**.  
Reinforced by the **Århus Convention**.

Require water managers with **new social and communication skills**.

## Ideas and Ideals of the Revolution - 7

The Directives will **change the constitution of Europe**

- It makes the **borders** between M.S. **less important.**
- **Bio-regional approach** is in conflict with traditional notions of **national sovereignty & territoriality.**
- **Water management highlights interdependence.**

**Start of a trans-national system of policy implementation.**  
**Might take a generation or two.**

## What does it mean for the World ?

“Revolutions do not follow precedents nor furnish them.”

- EU Directive may be **model** but is no **blueprint**.
  - Is based on **good water management principles**.
  - Builds on mature, rel. **effective administrations**.
  - Even **Europe needs capacity building**, and others?

**Shows trans-national co-operation towards sustainability through confidence building and conflict prevention.**

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