



Urban Waste Water: Commission decides to refer FRANCE to the Court of Justice over waste water treatment

Brussels, 9 June 2021

The European Commission has decided today to refer **France** to the Court of Justice for failure to comply with the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (Directive [91/271/EEC](#)). The Directive requires Member States to ensure that urban agglomerations (towns, cities, settlements) properly collect and treat their waste waters, thus eliminating or reducing all their undesirable effects.

The [European Green Deal](#) sets the EU a Zero Pollution ambition. Full implementation of the standards enshrined in EU legislation is important to effectively protect human health and safeguard the natural environment.

France should have been fully compliant with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive requirements since 2005. However, more than 100 agglomerations with a population of over 2000 do not comply with such requirements because urban waste water entering collecting systems is not subject to the appropriate level of treatment before being discharged, or because, even if the appropriate level is applied, treated waste waters do not reach the Directive's requirements.

Fifteen of these agglomerations also fail to meet additional requirements of the Directive related to the protection of sensitive areas from nutrients. Urban waste water entering collecting systems is either not subject to more stringent treatment before being discharged into those areas, or even when more stringent level is applied, the Directive's requirements are still not reached.

The Commission sent a letter of formal notice to the French authorities in October 2017, followed by a reasoned opinion in May 2020. Although the French authorities have shared monitoring data aimed at showing compliance with the requirements of the Directive for some of the agglomerations initially identified, the deficiencies and gaps remaining therein lead the Commission to conclude that the authorities have failed to prove compliance for the above-mentioned agglomerations.

Background

Untreated waste water can be contaminated with bacteria and viruses and thus presents a risk to human health. It also contains nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous which can damage freshwaters and the marine environment, by promoting excessive growth of algae that chokes other life, a process known as eutrophication.

The Commission published in September 2020 the [10th report on the implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive](#) that showed an overall improvement in collection and treatment of waste water in Europe's cities and towns, but pointed to different success levels between Member States.

For More Information

[Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive - Overview](#)

[Infringements database](#)

[EU infringements procedure](#)

[Link to the MEMO](#)

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