Summary Stakeholder Conference on the revision of the UWWTD

On 26 October 2021, the WAREG Secretariat attended the Stakeholder Conference on revising the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD). The Conference was organised as a joint event by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

Speakers (intervention order)

- **Mr Piotr Calbecki** (European Committee of the Regions, Rapporteur for the opinion on the fitness check on water legislation).
- **Mr Patrick Child** (European Commission, DG Environment, deputy Director-General).
- **Mr Hans Bruyninckx** (European Environment Agency, Executive Director).
- **Mr Michel Sponar** (European Commission, DG Environment, Marine Environment and Water Industry - ENV.C.2, Deputy Head of Unit).
- **Ms Anna Marczak** (European Commission, DG Environment, Marine Environment and Water Industry - ENV.C.2, Team Leader - Policy assistance / Water industry).
- **Ms Sarah Johansson** (European Environmental Bureau, Policy and Researcher for Industrial Production).
- **Mr Anders Finnson** (Svenskt Vatten, Swedish Water & Wastewater Association, Senior Environmental Advisor).
- **Mr Michaël Bentvelsen** (EurEau, Waste Water Committee, Co-chair).
- **Mr Mads Warming** (Danfoss, Waste & Wastewater, Global Lead).
- **Mr Xavier Leflaive** (OECD, Environment Directorate, Principal Administrator).
- **Ms Marieke Schouten** (European Committee of the Regions, Rapporteur for the Zero Pollution Action Plan).
- **Mr Milo Fiasconaro** (Aqua Publica Europea, Executive Director).
- **Ms Silvia Bartolini** (European Commission, DG Environment, Marine Environment and Water Industry - ENV.C.2, Head of Unit).

The Conference presented:

- the following preliminary considerations:
  - Are we investing where it makes sense? Are the costs higher to benefits?
  - Do we need the reported data? Is it coherent with other EU legislations?
  - What is the added value of EU targets/standards?
  - Who will pay and how much? Is it affordable?
  - Can we control at source? Is it reflecting best practices?
  - Is it easy to monitor and enforce? Are the deadlines reasonable?
- an overview of the areas of UWWTD that require improvement (shortcomings); and
- the policy options to address the identified shortcomings, each option reflecting a specific strategy (approach):

- **Policy option 1, EU soft guidance for local response**: Develop guidance documents to support authorities involved in enforcement and would introduce non-binding requirements for most areas of the Directive;
- **Policy option 2, a mix of policy responses:** Mandatory and non-mandatory requirements at different levels of governance (from local to EU level); and
- **Policy option 3, centralised responses setting EU requirements:** Binding EU obligations and Requirements applicable to the whole of the EU.

Areas of improvement and Policy options:

1. Reduce pollution from:

   a. Smaller agglomerations not covered by the UWWTD (below 2.000 population equivalent – p.e.):
      i. Option 1: **Member States** decide if the UWWTD applies to a small agglomeration based on a risk-based approach
      ii. Option 2: Collection, treatment and reporting required for **Agglomerations >1.000 p.e**.
      iii. Option 3: Collection, treatment and reporting required for **Agglomerations >500 p.e**.

   b. Small scale treatment in agglomerations (Individual and other appropriate systems - IAS):
      i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on IAS technologies, registration, monitoring and inspections. **Member States** to apply a risk-based approach to reduce IAS use.
      ii. Option 2: **Member States** must have a national inventory of IAS and implement a strategy for inspection & management. **Commission** to revise the EU standards on IAS. **Member States** to ensure that households connect to public networks if already possible.
      iii. Option 3: **Member States** must report to the Commission IAS monitoring data if >5% of the country's load is treated by IAS. **Member States** to ensure that IAS address a maximum of 2% of the load in any agglomeration.

   c. Nutrient in sensitive areas – addressing eutrophication:
      i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on designation of sensitive areas. **Member States** to decide if nutrient removal by treatment is needed in a particular plant.
      ii. Option 2: **Commission** to set higher nitrogen and phosphorous removal thresholds in the Directive. **Member States** to increase the efficiency of nutrient removal in treatment plants.
      iii. Option 3: **All treatment plants >10.000 p.e.** must remove nitrogen and phosphorous from wastewater.

d. Stormwater overflows (SWO):
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on strategies for stormwater overflows and urban run-off. **Member States** to apply a risk-based approach to reduce stormwater overflows.
   ii. Option 2: **Commission** to adopt EU targets for big agglomerations (such as >1% of annual sewage volume overflows). **Agglomerations >100.000 p.e**. must have a strategic plan to manage overflows and run-off based on prevention/green infrastructure.
   iii. Option 3: **Commission** to adopt EU targets for all agglomerations. **Agglomerations >50.000 p.e.** to have a strategic plan to manage overflows and run-off.

e. Industrial discharges:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on track and trace requirements. **Member States** reduce pollution at source based on a risk-based approach, for instance, when sludge is used in agriculture.
   ii. Option 2: **Operators** must monitor and track industrial pollution in the public networks and at the treatment plant's inlet. **Member States** to ensure that agglomerations control pollution at source at the industrial site.
   iii. Option 3: **Commission** to impose monitoring & reporting requirements on small and medium-sized businesses connected to the public networks. **Member States** must establish discharge permitting systems for industries not covered under Industrial Emissions Directive.

2. <u>Emerging Concerns</u>:

a. Reduce micropollutants:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance regarding micropollutants removal and monitoring the presence of microplastics in wastewater and sewage sludge. **Member States** to decide if micropollutants removal by treatment is needed in a particular plant.
   ii. Option 2: **Treatment plants >100 .00 p.e**. must monitor and remove micropollutants. **Operators** of remaining treatment plants must monitor micropollutants level in effluent and treat, where necessary.
   iii. Option 3: **Treatment plants >10.000 p.e**. must monitor and remove micropollutants.

b. Support Circular economy
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on phosphorous recovery and evaluating the potential for water reuse by treatment plants.
   ii. Option 2: **Treatment plants >100.000 p.e.** must recover phosphorous. **Commission** to provide minimum levels for phosphorous recovery.
   iii. Option 3: **All treatment** plants must recover phosphorous. If sludge is incinerated, phosphorous recovery is mandatory for min 80% recovery rate for phosphorus.

c. Increase energy efficiency
   i. Option 1**: Commission** to provide guidance on energy audits of treatment plants, including monitoring and reporting of energy use. **Member States** to decide which treatment plants need to be more energy-efficient.
   ii. Option 2: **Treatment plants >100.000 p.e.** must improve energy efficiency, including regular energy audits for their plants and public networks.
   iii. Option 3: **Treatment plants >10 000 p.e.** must improve energy efficiency, including regular energy audits for their plants and public networks.

d. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance regarding reporting of GHG emissions from treatment plants. **Member States** to decide how and to what extent treatment plants reduce GHG emissions.
   ii. Option 2: **Member States** must report to the Commission levels of GHG emissions from treatment plants. **Member States** must reduce GHG emissions to reach climate neutrality by 2050 for the sector.
   iii. Option 3: **Member States** must reduce GHG emissions to reach climate neutrality:
      - by 2035 for treatment plants >100.000 p.e. and by 2040 for the sector.

e. Wastewater surveillance:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance for a surveillance system for viruses and other pathogens present in wastewaters.
   ii. Option 2: **Treatment plants >100.000 p.e.** must have a permanent surveillance system for viruses and pathogens.
   iii. Option 3: **Treatment plants >50.000 p.e.** must have a permanent surveillance system for viruses and pathogens.

3. <u>Improving Governance</u>:

a. Extended producers responsibility (EPR) to fund micropollutant removal:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance regarding EPR. **Member States** to decide whether to fund upgrades of treatment plants by EPR.
   ii. Option 2: **Member State** must establish an EPR Scheme for pharmaceuticals to fund upgrades of treatment plants to remove micropollutants.
   iii. Option 3: **Member State** must establish a fund for upgrading of treatment plants to remove micropollutants. Obligation for EPR Scheme for pharmaceuticals and personal care products.

b. Supporting investment planning to avoid noncompliance:
   i. Option 1: **Member States** are encouraged to develop a national investment plan. No reporting obligation.

ii. Option 2: **Member States** must regularly submit a national investment plan to the Commission if they benefit from EU funding and/or are non-compliant. **Remaining Member States** report voluntarily.
iii. Option 3: **All Member States** must regularly submit a national investment plan to the Commission.

c. Monitoring and reporting:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on methodology, sampling conditions and frequency. **Member States** to ensure that key information is available at the national level.
   ii. Option 2: **Member States** must set up/host UWWTD data sets and ensure access to them for the Commission/EEA. **Member States** must update the data sets annually. Key information from data sets to be published annually on the EEA website
   iii. Option 3: **Commission** to improve the current reporting system and update parameters (such as micropollutants and COD). **Commission** to improve requirements on sampling conditions, methodology, frequency. **Member States** must report to the Commission annually (increased frequency).

d. Information to the public:
   i. Option 1: **Operators** are encouraged to make key information available on invoices to customers and websites. Information on treatment plants is available online.
   ii. Option 2: **Operators** must make key information available on invoices to customers and websites, including treatment plants discharge information.
   iii. Option 3: **Member States** must host an up-to-date website with key national information and links to websites containing local information.

e. Access to sanitation:
   i. Option 1: **Commission** to provide guidance on minimum EU targets for access to sanitation in agglomerations.
   ii. Option 2: **Member States** must take measures to ensure access to sanitation for vulnerable and marginalised groups and in public spaces.
   iii. Option 3: **Commission** to adopt EU minimum targets for access to sanitation.

Conclusions:

The Conference served to confirm the areas of the current UWWTD that the upcoming revision will address (for instance, to improve the Directive, align it with the green deal and make it fit for the future). These areas (shortcomings) were already identified in WAREG's EU Legislation Series Report on the UWWTD. Furthermore, the Conference provided a valuable insight on the different options (approaches) that the Commission is considering to implement changes in the UWWTD. The proposal of a revised directive will be issued during **the 2nd quarter of 2022**.