

COM-4/048

Brussels, 26 June 2001

## **OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 14 June 2001

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council**

**"Developing a New Bathing Water Policy"**

COM(2000) 860 final

### **The Committee of the Regions,**

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission on Developing a New Bathing Water Policy COM(2000) 860 final;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its Bureau of 13 June 2000 to draw up, in accordance with the fifth paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, an opinion on *Developing a New Bathing Water Policy*, and to assign the preparation of this opinion to Commission 4 for Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment;

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion (CdR 97/2001 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 4 on 3 May 2001 (rapporteur: **Mr Vito D'Ambrosio** - I, PSE);

WHEREAS the Treaty on European Union calls for environmental considerations to be integrated into all Community policies, with a view to securing sustainable development;

**adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 39<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 13 and 14 June 2001 (meeting of 14 June).**

## 1. Position of the Committee of the Regions

1. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission's communication on developing a new bathing water policy. The policy is urgently needed, and is designed to enable further progress along the path towards proper respect for the environment and public health.
2. The Committee believes that the new policy could also generate further economic growth in the Community, benefiting above all those areas that are committed to respecting and improving the environment, by both protecting the natural heritage and using ever higher standards of services and infrastructure to improve quality of life.

## 2. Recommendations of the Committee of the Regions regarding the plan for a new bathing water policy

1. The Committee recommends that the Commission pay special attention to the procedures for assessing eutrophic phenomena. These phenomena are often considered to be anomalies in the ecosystem and to be caused by pollution, but frequently they stem from an increase in plankton, resulting from natural events that have been happening for centuries and that do not therefore pose any of the specific risks associated with pollutants.
2. Eutrophic events on a very large scale, however, become a genuine environmental emergency, irrespective of the cause, natural or human. The resulting anoxia of the water, with the possibility of fish dying, floating and decaying in bathing water, poses a health and environmental danger and is also aesthetically unpleasant. These phenomena must be monitored, especially if the marine resources are prone to them. In northern Europe, the bathing season lasts only about a month and the number of bathers is low compared with southern Europe. The Committee feels that these differences should be taken into account. In the Committee's view, a bathing area should be defined as one that has been actively launched as a bathing area and is used by a significant number of bathers every season. Sampling should be organised so that areas with the highest risk are monitored more often. The criteria applicable to bathing areas with short bathing seasons must be such that the consequences of a negative sample do not hit these areas harder, given that there is not time to take such a complete series of samples.
3. In this connection, the Committee recommends that the Commission clearly address the growing problem of algae bloom and the danger to bathers posed by algae-borne toxins. A single nutrient parameter is not enough to describe in any meaningful way the nutrient status in relation to massive algae growth.
4. The Committee would point out to the Commission that one of the key factors in improving the efficiency of the monitoring analysis is speedy results that enable a rapid reaction. This requirement must be linked as a priority to the parameters aimed at safeguarding human health and to those used to indicate changes in water quality.
5. To this end, the Committee proposes that the monitoring mentioned in the Communication should include ammoniacal nitrogen, nitrous acid and nitric acid among the substances used to determine the degree of pollution and its development, as their presence can be determined relatively quickly enabling rapid responses, while waiting for bacteriological results, which take longer.
6. The Committee would stress the importance of accurate, standardised public information. More specifically, when pollution makes the water unsuitable for bathing,

the information provided must not be misleading or open to interpretation but rather visible and clear, possibly using symbols, especially when indicating the cause of the pollution. This information should cover various aspects:

- the site, characteristics and critical factors;
  - unfavourable meteorological/climatic and marine conditions affecting water quality;
  - the quality change assessed analytically.
7. The Committee would also stress the importance of allowing the regions and local authorities to make a positive contribution in the next stages of deciding on the technical and scientific details of the new European directive, through their own structures or local independent bodies responsible for environmental protection, for instance the regional environmental protection agencies existing in Italy and other Member States.
  8. The Committee would stress that attention must be given to timing and the resources needed to make the necessary improvements to restore and protect the quality of bathing waters. These measures too must be assessed on two distinct levels:
- action and measures concerning exceptional and unforeseen events;
  - action needed to deal with inadequate infrastructure, differentiating between small- and large-scale investments. In this respect, the Committee draws the Commission's attention to the extremely high cost for local authorities of any requirement to separate sanitary sewers from storm-water sewers. Such a measure should only be implemented if a preliminary assessment demonstrated the risks, in the area at risk considered, of maintaining a single sewerage system.
9. The Committee therefore invites the Commission not to rule out the deployment of adequate financial resources for the above-mentioned measures, to top up the resources provided by the Member States and regions concerned.
  10. The Committee would ask the Commission to bring the deadlines set in the new bathing water directive and the water framework directive into line with each other.

Brussels, 14 June 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Jos Chabert**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

---

--

--

CdR 97/2001 fin EN-IT/SG .../...

CdR 97/2001 fin EN-IT/SG/CAT/hm

CdR 97/2001 fin EN-IT/SG/CAT/hm

CdR 97/2001 fin EN-IT/SG/CAT/hm