

# Water Framework Directive: What is going on in Brussels regarding river policies?

Eef Silver – Wetlands International - European Association

Sarajevo, 28 September 2018

# Brief introduction

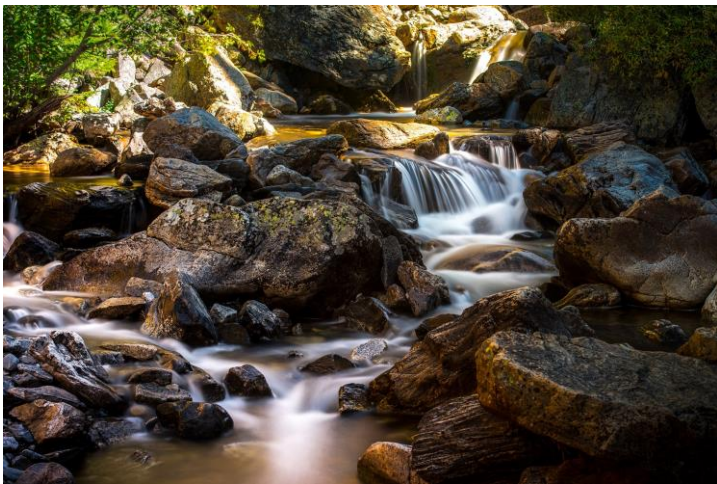
Please raise your hand if:

- You work on protecting rivers in the EU or Candidate Country
- You work on protecting rivers outside the EU
- You are familiar with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD)
- You can explain the criteria for Good Ecological Status in WFD terms

# Water Framework Directive

Cornerstone of EU water legislation

- Integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of waters
- Objectives: all water bodies in good status by 2015 and ultimately by 2027
- Powerful principles: non-deterioration and polluter pays
- River basin approach: planning, management, reporting



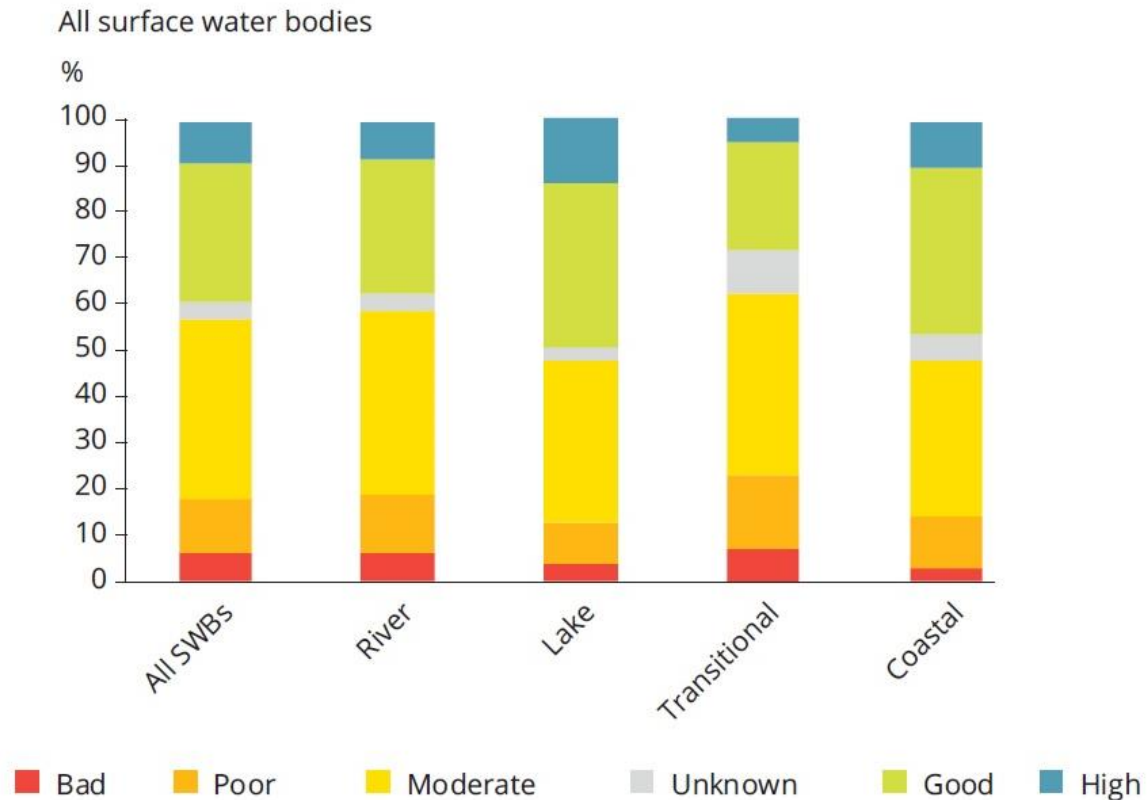
- River Basin Management Plans
- Reduce pressures to enable freshwater ecosystems to recover
- Reporting in 6 year-cycles
- Public participation

# State of our rivers

Eur. Environment Agency: State of Water 2018

- 40% of surface water bodies in good status
- 9% of natural rivers in high status
- > 40% of surface water bodies affected by physical changes (including dams)

## Ecological status/potential of rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters in the second RBMPs



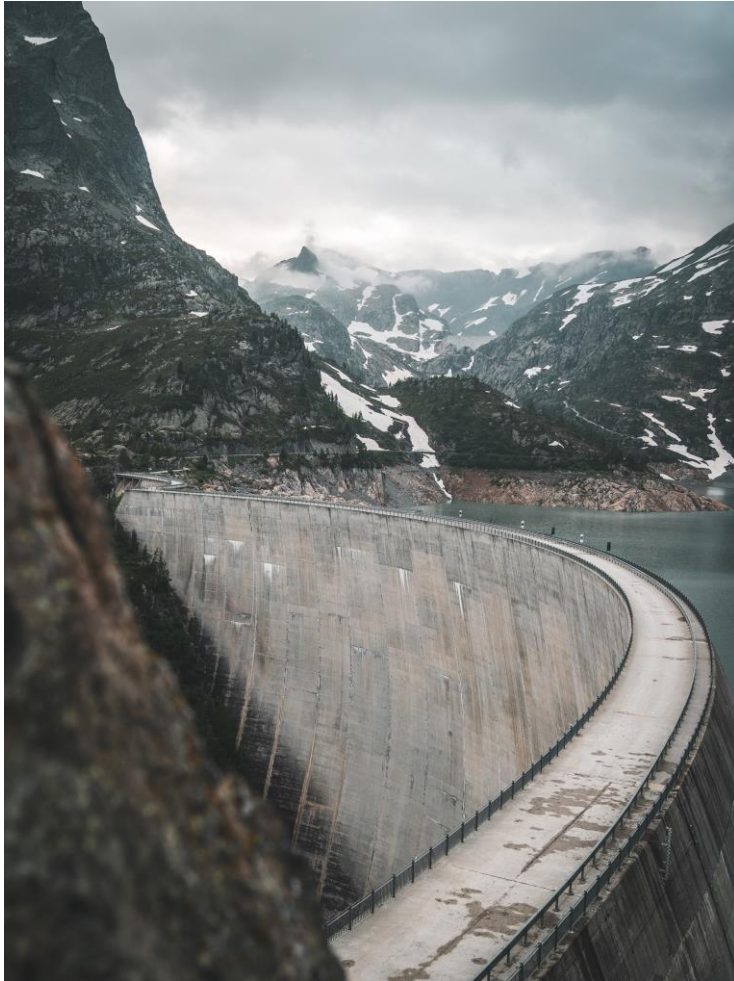
Source: WISE-SoW database including data from 25 Member States (EU-28 except Greece, Ireland and Lithuania).

# State of our rivers

- WFD has spurred water quality improvements
- Better knowledge available on state and pressures
- But: ongoing deterioration of rivers which outpaces restoration efforts in some countries
- Opportunities for improving implementation



# State of our rivers



- Eur. Environment Agency:

*„More than 25 000 hydropower plants in Europe have been identified as one of the main drivers affecting the status of rivers, resulting in the loss of connectivity, altered water flow and sediment transport”*

(SOER, 2015)

- Scale of measures too small
- Time delay in tangible improvements?
- 85% of first RBMPs didn't mention or justify exemptions for new hydropower projects

# The European scene

- Commission priorities: facilitate economic growth and climate-friendly energy
- Anti-European sentiment: less interference with MS
- This has guided EC policies, e.g.
  - Legal enforcement



# EC guidance on hydropower and Natura 2000



- Attempt to integrate energy and nature policies
- “low-carbon, green economy”
- Focus on mitigation of impacts rather than protection of rivers
- No appropriate measures to mitigate severe impacts of a new dam
- EEA: ‘Saturation point for rivers achieved’. Threat of cumulative impact

# Hydropower industry

Key arguments at EU level

HP plays a key role in supporting Europe's clean energy transition

HP enables more wind and solar generation due to its flexibility and storage capability

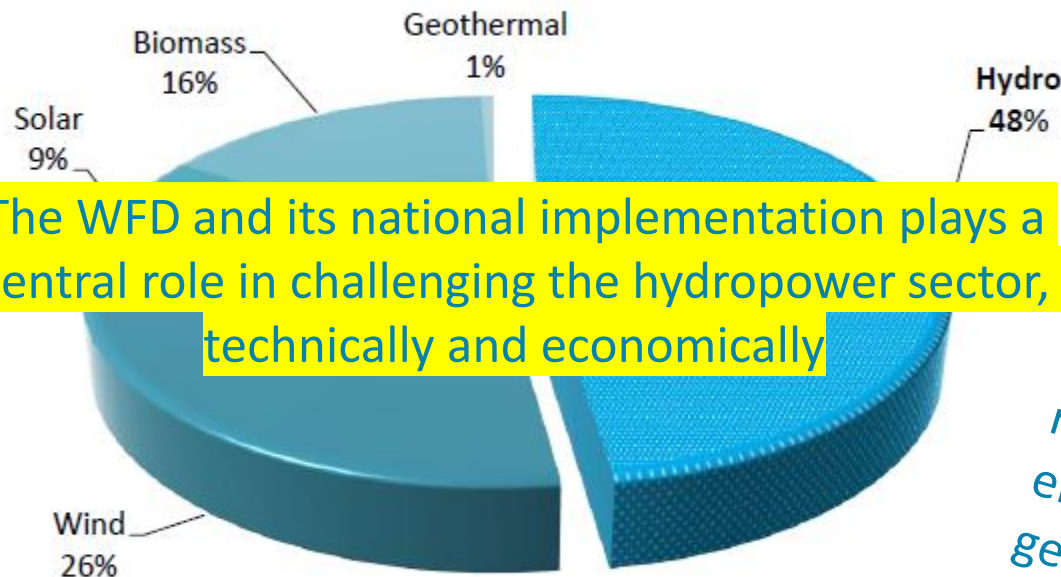
HP increases EU energy independency

HP reservoirs can secure water availability

WFD measures reduce the renewable electricity generation


The WFD and its national implementation plays a central role in challenging the hydropower sector, technically and economically

Electricity Generation from Renewables / EU 28 + No + Ch  
2015 - 1,150 TWh



Source: Eurelectric, EU Water Conference presentation 2018

# How WFD can challenge HP in practice

 Used for identifying areas (not) for hydropower development

- Pre-planning instruments: to identify areas not suitable for developing hydropower because of impacts on nature
- Retrofitting of dams and dam removal

France: two lists of rivers

## 1. Protection (no go)

- Rivers in high status
- Part of Natura 2000
- Important for fish migration

## 2. Restoration

- Priority for restoring continuity

# WFD review 2018-2019



# WFD review 2018-2019

“To maintain a high ambition”

- Member States believe WFD needs a revision
- High pressure for more flexibility in:
  - Time to achieve good status (2045?)
  - Public participation
  - Methods to communicate positive results
- Less infringements to not frustrate MS efforts
- Climate change creates uncertainty in restoring ecosystems

# WFD review 2018-2019

Healthy water ecosystems have an essential role  
for nature, society and economy

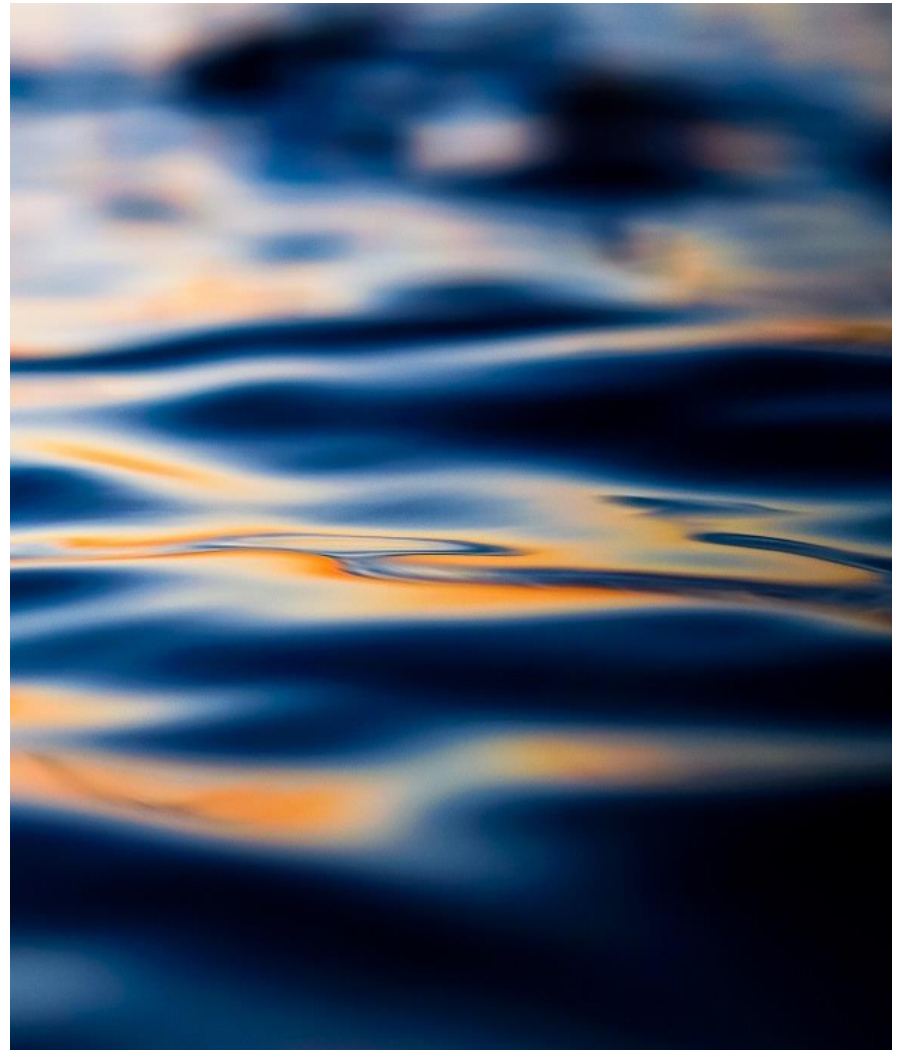
NGOs want:

- More effort and funding for sustainable management of water and protection of water ecosystems in Europe;
- Improved implementation of the WFD;
- Better enforcement, policy integration, transparency and public participation;
- No further deterioration of waters;
- Ensure good status through restoration of degraded ecosystems (especially large scale restoration and dam removal).

# Scenarios for the WFD

1. WFD stays intact, focus on better implementation
2. Amendments will be proposed
3. Adopt an act to update the directive

Commission's decision after elections 2019



# Conclusions

- European rivers are under high pressure from physical changes
- Deterioration of rivers outpaces restoration efforts
- WFD is a powerful tool to take action against the hydropower sector
- WFD is under review and attacked by MS, industry

# Act now!

- Participate in EC consultation until March 2019
- Share your vision for living rivers
- Showcase evidence of good practices
- Share your ideas how to improve bad practices
- Enter in dialogue with your national government and river basin authorities
- Join the discussion at our workshop today  
(Wetlands International and Italian Centre for River Restoration)



# Thank you!

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