



Recommendation 1224 (1993)¹

Protection and management of freshwater resources in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Fresh water is an increasingly scarce resource, a fundamental aspect of life, development and economic well-being.
2. This resource, which has deteriorated through past misuse, the effects of which are still persisting, is now subject to continual aggressions due to a variety of uses which degrade, sometimes irreversibly, its quality.
3. Moreover, inappropriate uses and waste caused by the irrational behaviour of different categories of consumers are resulting in a considerable decline in quantitative terms.
4. In addition, the unequal distribution of this resource may contribute to geo-political instability and in certain regions of the globe threatens to become a source of armed conflict.
5. The essential principles of the European Water Charter adopted by the Council of Europe in 1967, which draws governments' attention to the need to manage this vital form of wealth on a joint basis, to itemise and protect the resource and to adopt a common and integrated global approach to the task, are just as valid today.
6. When applied to water, the concept of sustainable development, as defined in the Brundtland report and reaffirmed at the Rio Conference, entails:
 - 6.1. managing water resources as a capital asset in a way which incorporates all the uses of water and recognises the concept of solidarity towards future generations;
 - 6.2. taking account of the management of ecosystems and the life they support;
 - 6.3. reinforcing the concept of regional planning, in which natural resources - and above all water - are taken into account;
 - 6.4. taking a forward-looking approach to the resource before the curative approach to water pollution.
7. The "Freshwater Europe" action programme enabled the Assembly to invite the different groups involved in water management (decision-makers at all levels, representatives of industry and of scientific and technical circles, non-governmental organisations and so on) to The "Freshwater Europe" action programme enabled the Assembly to invite the different groups involved in water management (decision-makers at all levels, representatives of industry and of scientific and technical circles, non-governmental organisations and so on) to
8. It acknowledges the success of the "Freshwater Europe" action programme which, through its different meetings, colloquies, conferences and activities for increasing public awareness in partnership with the groups referred to above, has contributed to the emergence of a number of proposals and a greater awareness of the challenges which water management poses.

1. Assembly debate on 1st October 1993 (51st Sitting) (see [Doc. 6909](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur: Mr Ruffy; and [Doc. 6939](#), opinion of the Committee on Science and Technology, Rapporteur: Mr Birraux). Text adopted by the Assembly on 1st October 1993 (51st Sitting).



9. The Assembly is particularly conscious of the specific problems related to freshwater resources management in the Mediterranean basin.
10. As the work associated with this initiative drew to a close, it became clear that water management policies must take account of five principles:
 - 10.1. production of an inventory and the monitoring of water resources, by encouraging data centralisation, standardisation and accessibility in order to plan and implement appropriate solutions at the relevant level;
 - 10.2. adoption of integrated management linked to regional planning, which takes particular account of land use, the application of the polluter-pays principle and of the subsidiarity principle in accordance with the distribution of abilities and responsibilities, existing or subject to modification, among the various decision-making levels;
 - 10.3. a policy geared to economy and re-use after sewage treatment;
 - 10.4. development of partnerships to ensure compatibility between ideas and actions and a proper match between identified needs and the safeguarding and use of resources;
 - 10.5. education and training to allow not only elected representatives and professionals in the field, but also ordinary citizens from school age on, to exercise their responsibilities.
11. These principles are consistent with the Assembly's stated aim of encouraging the emergence of coherent pan-European policies by its involvement in the sharing of knowledge, particularly by encouraging transfrontier co-operation.
12. While it is aware that many of the issues relating to the implementation of an integrated water management policy, such as charging systems or the establishment of uniform quality standards, are the responsibility of other European and/or international bodies, the Assembly is convinced that the Council of Europe can make a valuable contribution to the development of a pan-European policy in this area.
13. It therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 13.1. draw the attention of the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Authorities to the significant role which territorial authorities can play in good water management and invite it to extend the search for practical responses in this area;
 - 13.2. ask the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe:
 - a. to take account of the results of those aspects of the "Freshwater Europe" action programme which focus on the role and responsibilities of local authorities;
 - b. to give consideration to a special programme on these issues aimed at the countries of central and eastern Europe, which have expressed the wish that the Council of Europe continue the activities initiated under "Freshwater Europe";
 - c. to draw up a training programme on issues relating to water management, to be implemented within the framework of the European network of training centres for the staff of territorial authorities;
 - 13.3. invite the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE) to establish a working party with a view to extending the activities already carried out by the Working Party on the Rhine Valley Groundwater, established on the Assembly's initiative in the early 1970s, particularly taking into consideration the indissoluble link arising from the management of the two resources, land and underground water;
 - 13.4. draw up proposals, based on earlier work, for the inclusion of the problem of water management and of a pan-European policy in this area on the agenda of the 3rd European Ministerial Conference on the Environment, scheduled for 1995 in Sofia in Bulgaria;
 - 13.5. invite the Committee of Senior Officials responsible for preparing the next European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) to take account of the studies already carried out on the integration of water resource management in regional planning policies;
 - 13.6. ask the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC):
 - a. to examine the feasibility of initiating education programmes on water management, for example within the context of multilateral co-operation between schools in the different countries bordering a great river;

- b.* to consider the establishment of a network of universities concerned with issues relating to water management, in order to enable them to co-ordinate their activities.
- 14. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member states:
 - 14.1. to encourage any initiative concerned with water management designed to safeguard its quality and quantity, not only today but also for future generations;
 - 14.2. to ensure that the water resources managers - either public or private - exercise a pricing policy determined by the totality of the exploitation costs including, if possible, those induced by sewerage, and fixed to correspond scrupulously to the cost of production according to the basic consumption indispensable for everyone;
 - 14.3. to take into consideration the contribution of the non-governmental organisations in the formulation and implementation of the policies regarding protection and freshwater resources management.