

# EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

## FORUM OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Ref. 24-2176

29 November 2024

### 26<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

*Brussels, 28–29 November 2024*

## **Opinion on the Transposition of the Directive on Urban Wastewater Treatment**

**Rapporteur: Þórdís Lóa Þórhallsdóttir**

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities

- A. Having regard to the European Commission's proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast) (COM (2022) 541 final);
  - B. Having regard to the formal adoption of the directive in the European Parliament on 10 April 2024, and its adoption in Council on 5 November 2024;
  - C. Acknowledging the role of the EEA EFTA Forum as a body in the EFTA structure as stipulated in Decision of the Standing Committee of the EFTA States No 10/2009/SC establishing a Forum of Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities of the EEA EFTA States;
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- 1. Recognises that the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) has played a crucial role in improving the quality of the rivers, lakes and seas in Europe, with a beneficial impact on our ecosystems and our citizens' health and quality of life;
  - 2. Welcomes that the issue of climate change, as well as other pollutants of concern, including microplastics and pharmaceuticals that are an increasing source of concern,

are now being addressed in the directive;

3. Stresses that the precautionary principle and pollution prevention at source must be the first steps to address these issues over end-of-pipe solutions;
  4. Raises concerns of the potential consequences of the adopted UWWTD when it comes to the costs inflicted on inhabitants, lack of access to skilled labour and the short timeline to implement the directive, and questions whether the energy neutrality requirement is feasible at national level in the EEA EFTA States;
  5. Points to the unique situation in Iceland and Norway, whose location to the far North, very sparsely populated regions, long coastlines and cold climates mean that in most areas the quality of the recipient is substantially higher than in other regions in Europe;
  6. Is of the view that the use of a nature-based solution such as filtration must be considered in areas where the natural conditions indicate that this will be the most sustainable solution;
  7. Highlights that it is more difficult to apply an effective biological wastewater treatment in cold climates, and that it will be more costly and require higher energy consumption to do so;
  8. Highlights that in the Member States the delineation of agglomerations is not set by the directive's provisions but follows from the preamble, and therefore urges the EEA EFTA States to ensure as much room for manoeuvre as possible as regards the definition of agglomerations when implementing the directive;
  9. Highlights that many of the rural areas that will now fall within the scope of the directive have a high outflux of population, in addition to an ageing rural population. It is therefore necessary to give these areas an extension of deadlines for compliance;
  10. Urges the EEA EFTA States to consult at local and regional level during their negotiations with the EU regarding the UWWTD.
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