

## **SURFRIDER'S FOUNDATION CALL FOR A STRONG AND FAR-REACHING UWWTD TO SUPPORT THE EU IN ACHIEVING A TOXIC-FREE ENVIRONMENT**



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**This morning, on the 24th of October, Surfrider Foundation invited the European press and media to a press briefing on the upcoming revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. The organisation presented a state of play of the Directive, its achievements and remaining challenges, before highlighting its expectations and claims for an ambitious revision of the UWWTD.**

**[Watch the press conference again here](#)**

Exactly two days before the release of a proposal for a revised UWWTD **as part of the European Commission's Zero Pollution Package**, Surfrider Foundation Europe shares its considerations and proposals to update the Directive and adapt it society's current challenges. This is a crucial time for us to influence the policy-making process and ensure the new measures implemented will guarantee the protection of the ocean and its users.

Urban wastewater is affected by several sources of pollution before being released in our rivers and eventually into our coasts and oceans. Published in 1991, the UWWTD aims to **protect the environment and human health from the adverse effects of urban wastewater discharges** by requiring the collection, treatment and discharge of wastewater under certain conditions in Europe and by increasing treatment obligations for Member States.

Urban Wastewater Treatment plants (UWWTPs) intervene at the very end of the water cycle, before wastewater is released into the environment. It is **the last instrument to treat water pollution** before it impacts our marine and aquatic environments as well as our own health.

The Directive has played a crucial role in the reduction of pollutants impacting water bodies (including bathing and recreational sites), especially in terms of bacteriological pollution. However, **water pollution is still massively observed across Europe** with UWWTPs remaining an important pressure for water quality. Surfrider Foundation Europe wished to shine a spotlight on three major issues related to the UWWTD and impacting our coasts.

1. **Despite considerable achievements, some sources of pollution remain inadequately addressed.** Discharges from small agglomerations and non-connected dwellings, individual and other appropriate systems, deteriorating and non-compliant

infrastructures directly affect the water quality of our rivers, lakes and coasts. Stormwater overflows and urban runoffs are especially impacting the quality of bathing and recreational waters.

**2. Chemical pollution was not initially foreseen by the UWWTD in 1991 despite its increasing impact on the water quality of our ecosystems and our wellbeing.** While household wastewater is the reflection of what we consume and chemical substances are now found everywhere in our homes, UWWTPs are not equipped to effectively deal with this type of pollution.

**3. A newly identified source of plastic pollution is also thwarting the Directive's key purpose: the release of biocarriers by UWWTPs.** Biocarrier pollution cases are increasingly being reported. They can be directly linked with wastewater treatment plants as they intervene during the biological treatment phase of wastewater. Due to a lack of monitoring and protective measures, they escape sewer systems and are released into the environment the same way untreated sewage may be during an overflow.

In light of these outstanding issues identified, **Surfrider Foundation Europe expects an ambitious revision of the UWWTD, reflecting the challenges of our times in terms of wastewater management** and calls for:

- A stronger and clarified framework to regulate the collection, treatment and discharge of urban wastewater in Europe and fight against the unintended discharges of raw sewage from overflows or inadequate/non-connected sewer systems
- An increased, more stringent level of wastewater treatment across Europe targeting specifically emerging pressures such as chemical water pollution
- The establishment of prevention measures as well as monitoring and reporting obligations from UWWTPs regarding the use biocarriers
- The harmonisation of EU water and marine policies to ensure a coherent legislative framework to address water pollution and reduce the emission of pollutants at source
- The provision of accessible public information and opportunities for citizen feedback on urban wastewater treatment in general, and on the occurrence and potential risks from accidents and malfunctions at UWWTPs.

We remain at your disposal for any further questions.

#### **About Surfrider Foundation Europe**

*Surfrider Foundation Europe, an NGO created in 1990, works to protect the oceans, the coastline, the waves and their users. For 30 years, with a team of experts and 48 volunteer chapters in 12 European countries, the association has been working with stakeholders (citizens, private and public sectors)*

on several major issues: marine litter, coastal development, climate change, water quality and user health. Discover on <https://surfrider.eu/en> or [via this video](#)

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