

# Waste water: Commission refers Sweden to the Court for its failure to treat urban waste water

Today, the European Commission decided to refer Sweden to the Court of Justice of the EU over its failure to ensure that urban waste water from a number of agglomerations receives adequate treatment, as required under EU rules ([Council Directive 91/271/EEC](#)). Untreated wastewater can put human health at risk and pollute lakes, rivers, soil and coastal and groundwater.

Sweden has failed to ensure that urban waste water is subject to appropriate treatment before it is discharged back into the environment. Although there has been progress towards compliance, Sweden is still failing to meet its obligations under EU law. Four agglomerations that discharge into sensitive areas (*Borås, Habo, Skoghall and Töreboda*) should have been in compliance since December 1998, and 6 more agglomerations (*Lycksele, Malå, Mockfjärd, Pajala, Robertsfors and Tännålen*) should have achieved compliance by December 2005.

The Commission decided to open the EU infringement procedure by sending a letter of formal notice to Sweden in [January 2010](#), followed by additional letters sent in September 2015 and April 2017, as well as a reasoned opinion in [November 2018](#). As there is still not full compliance by all the agglomerations in question, the Commission has decided to refer the case to the Court of Justice of the EU.

## **Background**

The [Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive](#) ([Council Directive 91/271/EEC](#)) requires Member States to ensure that agglomerations (towns, cities, settlements) properly collect and treat their urban waste-water. Untreated waste water can be contaminated with harmful bacteria and viruses, presenting a risk to human health. It also contains nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, which can damage freshwaters and the marine environment, promoting excessive algae growth that chokes other living organisms, a process known as eutrophication.

## **For More Information**