

Water reuse for agricultural irrigation: Council approves provisional deal



Using reclaimed water for agricultural irrigation is good for the environment.

The EU is taking new measures to **reduce the risk of shortages of water** for irrigating crops. The EU ambassadors of the member states today endorsed the provisional agreement which had been found with the European Parliament on a regulation which will facilitate the use of treated urban waste water for agricultural irrigation. This endorsement clears the way for final adoption.

The rules will help Europe adapt to the consequences of climate change. The regulation, which is fully in line with the circular economy, will **improve the availability of water and encourage its efficient use**. Ensuring that enough water is available for the irrigation of fields, in particular during heatwaves and severe droughts, can help prevent crop shortfall and food shortages.

Given that the **geographic and climatic conditions vary greatly across member states**, a member state may decide that it is not appropriate to use reclaimed water for agricultural irrigation in part or all of its territory.

Member states may also decide to use reclaimed water for other uses such as **industrial water reuse** and for amenity-related and environmental purposes.

The regulation contains strict requirements for the quality of reclaimed water and its monitoring to ensure that **human and animal health as well as the environment are protected**.

Savings of water resources as a result of water reuse will be the subject of general awareness raising campaigns in member states where reclaimed water is used for agricultural irrigation.

The Commission is required to assess the need to **review the minimum requirements of the reclaimed water**, based on the results of an evaluation of the implementation of this regulation or whenever **new technical and scientific knowledge** so requires.

Background

Several member states have a long and successful experience in using reclaimed water for different purposes, including for agricultural irrigation. This is better for the environment than alternative water supply methods such as water transfers or desalination. The new rules will be particularly useful in regions where the demand for water still exceeds supply, despite preventive measures to lower demand. The existing EU rules on

the hygiene of foodstuffs continue to apply and will be fully respected.

The European Commission adopted the proposal for a regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse on 28 May 2018 as part of delivering on the circular economy action plan. The European Parliament adopted its position on the proposal on 12 February 2019. The Council agreed its position (general approach) on 26 June 2019.

Negotiations with the European Parliament started on 10 October and ended in a provisional agreement on 2 December, which was confirmed by the EU ambassadors of the member states today. This paves the way for the formal adoption of the new rules, which will happen in 2020.

The regulation will then be published in the Official Journal of the EU, and will enter into force on the twentieth day after its publication. It shall apply from three years after the date of entry into force.