

# How can we promote *sustainable water management* (quantity, quality, sharing) *in the face of climate change?*

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The UN Water Conference, the first in 50 years, which started on 22 March 2023 in New York, has drawn up a particularly alarming report: multiple droughts, fires, water pollution, water as a source of conflict, etc. In France, the effects of climate change on water are already visible and will become increasingly so.

The ESEC has been addressing this issue extensively for many years. In September 2022, it issued a warning in a Statement on Water and recently focused on water management in the Overseas Territories. At a time when the situation regarding this precious resource is still strained due to the impacts of climate change with hydrological consequences, anthropic pressures, conflicts of use, pollution of the resource etc., the ESEC has decided to extend its thinking on the quality, quantity and sharing of water, in order to sustainably manage this resource, a common heritage.

It welcomes the fact that this subject is now on the political agenda at the highest level, as shown by the announcement of the Water Plan by the President of the Republic on 30 March. The aim of the opinion is to provide specific recommendations on this multi-faceted problem and to provide input for political decisions by going even further on the management of water quantity and quality.



-14%  
of euros

of the 'renewable water' resource in France, down over 20 years

Source: Ministry for Ecology published - June 2022

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In the face of the climate emergency, the ESEC proposes that France take strong measures to save water, which is a common resource for all and a heritage to be developed and maintained rather than repaired.

It proposes recommendations, some of which are in line

with those of the Water Plan, but which go further in supporting the ecological transition by emphasising several aspects: developing better knowledge of the water cycle and the impact of climate change in this area; the need for greater restraint; the need to increase efforts to preserve water quality,

particularly by combatting pollution; the need to invest massively in the renovation of drinking water and water treatment infrastructures, as well as to make progress in reuse; the improvements to be made in water governance and financing.



### **A Strengthen R&D (public and private) in terms of resources and people**

- for climatology disciplines -seasonal forecasting, meteorology, hydrology, and knowledge of aquatic ecosystems and how they work (natural sciences)

### **B Objectivising the debate on basins**

- by publicising the total volumes withdrawn and the agricultural irrigation strategies. Ban the use of public funds to subsidise any project for creating mega-basins, particularly those fed by pumping from groundwater, which has multiple impacts (monopolisation of water resources, degradation of the environment & biodiversity, risk to human health).

### **C Make manufacturers responsible for the overall treatment of their operational discharges:**

- by recycling more of their wastewater in closed/semi-closed circuits, demanding more transparency on the quantity used in relation to the available resources, the quality throughout water circulation (from pumping to discharge) and keeping the populations concerned informed.
- Identify, list and manage all industrial discharges, not just those from classified facilities.

### **D Prepare and publicise an assessment of the implementation of the Water Conferences:**

- objectives achieved and not achieved, and the measures needed to achieve them. Reminder of the Conferences' goal: reduction of water withdrawals by 10% in 2025 and 25% in 2035, the restoration of 25,000 km of watercourses and the protection of 500 additional water catchments by 2025.

### **E Accelerate the necessary phase-out of pesticides in agriculture**

- strengthen actions and controls to achieve the objectives of the Ecophyto plans. Support the proposed revision of the Pesticides Directive and call for its rapid adoption and transposition as soon as possible to enable their effective elimination. Mobilise funding to implement existing or future alternatives, based on the prospective scenarios produced by INRAE 'Pesticide-free European agriculture in 2022 2050'.

### **F Implement the process of preparing and adopting a water development and management plan (SAGE) in areas not yet covered**

- with the integration of reduced withdrawal targets. Ensure the effectiveness of the widespread implementation of Regional Water Management Projects (PTGE) by promoting the participation of all organisations and actors concerned, and also citizens.

### **G Review pricing, initiate a public debate on the appropriateness of changes that could be made to the water pricing system in mainland regions and overseas territories with the aim of:**

- introducing a social and progressive water pricing system, depending on the composition of households;
- banning discounted rates based on volume and adopting prohibitive pricing for excessive water consumption, with a view to moderating use and combatting waste. A discussion to be conducted both from a temporal (drought) and spatial (seasonal movements) point of view with regard to regions' specific characteristics and capacities.

#### THE RAPPORTEURS

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