

## POSITION PAPER

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### Wastewater matters too: Orgalim's recommendations for the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

Extreme weather conditions, the presence of new contaminants and obsolete existing water infrastructure have been identified as some of the main challenges to wastewater treatment capacities. At the same time, 80% of waste water in the world is currently discarded without sufficient cleaning and proper treatment, further impacting and posing a threat to marine and water ecosystems. To alleviate these pressures and enable progress in adequately treated wastewater and overall freshwater quality, Orgalim, Europe's Technology Industries, advocates for [the sustainable use and management of water in Europe](#).

A wide range of smart and sustainable European technologies apply to industrial and municipal wastewater treatment, resource recovery processes, closed-loop water treatment and nature-based solutions. These technologies have played a key role in reducing pollutants in wastewater, driving forward the main goal of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD, [91/271/EEC](#)) - the EU's key water legislation.

Orgalim welcomes the European Commission's (EC) recent Fitness Check of the UWWTD and the finding that the Directive is fit for purpose, with scope to improve its effectiveness. For the Directive to be fit for current and future challenges, Orgalim urges European Union (EU) policy makers to:

1. **Revise the Directive** in light of new societal challenges and technological advances, and
2. **Enforce the Directive's implementation** by setting clear targets, enabling sustainable water financing and directly incentivising the deployment of innovative wastewater technologies.

This would further unlock European technologies' potential to contribute to the achieving of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and the wider EU policy goals of climate neutrality and adaptation, biodiversity protection, a circular economy, and a zero-polluted environment as enshrined in the European Green Deal.

Against this background, we call upon EU policy makers to revise the UWWTD in such a way as to:

- **Bring circularity into wastewater by elevating resource efficiency ambition.** The Commission should consider setting goals and action plans for the recovery of resources from wastewater streams and incentivising water reuse, in close connection with the WFD water resource management plans.

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- **Boost energy efficiency in the wastewater sector to contribute to achieving the climate neutrality goal by 2050**, by setting concrete interim energy efficiency goals by 2030 through the Energy Efficiency Directive, set to be revised in 2021. Pave the way for plant operators to make use of already existing highly energy-efficient and energy-neutral wastewater technologies, which can also turn wastewater plants into energy producers. This is of particular relevance given that the energy use of the water sector is projected to double by 2040<sup>1</sup>.
- **Mainstream digitalisation in the wastewater sector.** Better uptake of already existing digitally-enabled water technologies, such as satellite imagery, sensors and smart metering, can ensure reliable and real-time monitoring and reporting of collecting systems (crucial in the event of heavy rainfalls and storm water overflows) and discharged treated water. This would encourage, and eventually lead to, better water governance.
- **Address storm water overflows and urban run-off** by monitoring and controlling their effect, since this significantly pollutes receiving waters.
- **Deal with new contaminants, namely pharmaceuticals, both at the source and the wastewater plants level** by incentivising the use of cost-effective treatment technologies. The Directive should consider addressing other contaminants once they are scientifically identified and proved to be of concern.
- **Incentivise full cost recovery of wastewater treatment in accordance with Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive.** Given that only a few member states charge users for the full wastewater sector service, the EU should empower member states to embrace a cost-reflective wastewater price, in a close dialogue with all water users, while raising awareness of the benefits of treating wastewater. This would also boost the roll-out of smart and environmentally-friendly water technologies in the market.
- **Extend the scope to small agglomerations and non-connected dwellings.** Non-centralised wastewater treatment systems and innovative, cost-effective technologies can help addressing inadequate or missing wastewater treatment in these areas, and achieving overall good water status under the WFD.
- **Help bridging the existing €253 billion finance need<sup>2</sup> and step up 2021-2027 EU financing** available for the wastewater sector and innovative wastewater technologies. This would significantly help plant operators to upgrade the existing wastewater infrastructure and bring member states closer to full compliance with the UWWTD requirements by 2030. The EU should also allocate financial means to innovation funds for resource recovery techniques.
- **Benchmark wastewater sector service in the EU, as a follow up measure**, which would facilitate the exchange of best practices and technology solutions in the EU and beyond.
- **Build up policy coherence** with the Water Framework Directive, Industrial Emission Directive (IED) and the Sewage Sludge Directive, potentially through the upcoming zero-pollution plan for air, water and soil, in an effort to avoid legal uncertainties. We would also welcome further clarity

<sup>1</sup> International Energy Agency, [World Energy Outlook Special Report: Water-Energy Nexus](#), March 2017

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary finding of a study on investment needs in the EU's water sector conducted by the OECD, not published yet.

regarding industrial wastewater and requirements in the regulations/authorisations for industrial wastewater discharges into urban waste water systems.

We strongly recommend that these remarks are well reflected when revising the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and formulating the zero-pollution action plan for air, water, and soil in 2021. Europe's innovative technology industries are ready to lead the transition to a greener, water smart society and cities, together with other stakeholders on board and with the right policy and institutional solutions in place.