

Politics och Society

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Swedenergy is a non-profit industry and special interest organisation for companies that supply, distribute, sell, and store energy – mainly electricity, heating, and cooling. Swedenergy monitors and promotes the interests of its members and the Swedish energy sector. We gather nearly 500 companies, which include state-owned, municipal, and private companies, as well as associations within the energy sector.

Swedenergy's response to the call for evidence on the Water framework directive

Swedenergy welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's call for evidence on a potential targeted revision of the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

Key message

- The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is a cornerstone of EU water policy and provides a robust framework for sustainable water management that should be preserved.
- Reliable and affordable low-carbon electricity is essential for EU competitiveness, security of supply, climate objectives and biodiversity protection. Environmental and energy policies must therefore be better aligned.
- Hydropower, including pumped storage, plays a critical role in providing low-carbon flexibility, system services, crisis preparedness and efficient integration of variable renewables.
- In several Member States, implementation of the WFD remains technically and economically challenging, creating barriers to new projects and upgrades that are essential for the energy transition.
- In certain cases, the WFD leads to administrative burdens and procedural hurdles that could be streamlined without lowering environmental ambition.
- Greater recognition is needed that ecological status can be influenced by climate change and other non-voluntary factors beyond the control of individual operators.
- A revision of the Water Framework Directive should in addition to the critical raw materials also address barriers for other sectors.
- Clarifications to Article 4(7), Article 11(3) and continued flexibility under Article 4(4) would improve legal certainty, proportionality and permitting efficiency while preserving environmental objectives.

The sections below elaborate on these key messages by outlining Swedenergy's views on the relevance of the Water Framework Directive, its implementation challenges and potential areas for clarification.

Aligning water, energy and climate objectives

The availability of reliable and affordable electricity is essential for European industrial competitiveness. Replacing imported fossil energy with domestically produced low carbon electricity contributes simultaneously to competitiveness, security of supply, climate objectives and biodiversity protection, given the increasing impacts of climate change on ecosystems. Fit-for-purpose legislation that better aligns environmental and energy policies, both in legislation and in implementation, is therefore crucial.

Relevance to the energy sector

The WFD is relevant to the energy sector across multiple business activities and technologies such as hydropower, thermal- and nuclear power and industry decarbonisation.

Hydropower is a backbone of a secure and flexible power system

The upgrading and expansion of hydropower assets are essential to meeting the growing demand for low-carbon flexibility and electricity storage. Hydropower, including pumped-storage facilities, delivers the full spectrum of system services required for secure grid operation and the efficient integration of variable renewable energy sources. In addition, these assets play a crucial role in crisis preparedness through superior black-start and islanding capabilities, while also supporting employment, innovation, and resilient European supply chains.

Challenges in national implementation

Experience shows that implementation of the WFD remains challenging in several Member States, both technically and economically. In some cases, the current framework makes it particularly difficult to approve new projects or upgrades, which risks creating unnecessary barriers to investments that are essential for achieving the EU's overall climate and energy objectives.

In certain cases, the WFD can give rise to administrative burdens and procedural hurdles that could be further streamlined without reducing environmental ambition. There is also a need for clearer recognition that ecological status can be influenced by climate change and other nonvoluntary phenomena beyond the control of individual operators.

Proposals for targeted revision

The following targeted clarifications could improve legal certainty, flexibility and efficiency while preserving the Directive's objectives

Article 4(4)

Extensions of deadlines should continue to be allowed where improvements must be achieved in phases for reasons of technical feasibility, or where completing measures within the original timeframe would be disproportionately expensive.

Article 4(7)

- Paragraph 1 should also cover impacts arising from pollution.

- Paragraph 2 should allow greater flexibility for sustainable human development activities.
- Condition (c) should explicitly include *climate change mitigation* and *security of supply* as a reason for modifications.
- Condition (d) should be refined to avoid unnecessary administrative duplication where alternatives are already assessed, for example under environmental impact assessments.

Article 11(3)

Clarification is needed that periodic reviews relate to systems for controlling water abstraction (such as registers and licensing frameworks), rather than to individual permits. Periodic review of individual permits would place a disproportionate burden on authorities and run counter to the EU objective of streamlined permitting.