
The post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy and Water Management in the Danube River Basin



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Discussions on the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have started with the proposed EC Regulation (COM (2018) 392), which details the regulatory framework for a "future-proof" CAP. The suggested increased ambition regarding environmental and climate protection in response to international commitments, EU environmental challenges and societal expectations is highly desirable.

The proposal aims at strengthening the connection of CAP support to the compliance of farmers with obligations to protect the environment, public, animal and plant health as well as animal welfare established as conditions for area related payments. A new enhanced conditionality is proposed as an integral part of the future CAP framework, which would replace the current 'greening' and cross-compliance. It would set the baseline for more ambitious and sustainable agricultural commitments through the adoption of good farming practices and standards by farmers. The introduction of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive into the conditionality would support their implementation and the achievement of their specific objectives. In addition, new Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions could potentially have a positive impact on water quality. Such an addition would bring a dedicated tool for optimizing on-farm nutrient management and protect peatlands and wetlands. Conditionality would be mandatory for Member States to implement and for those receiving direct payments to comply with.

The post-2020 CAP envisages requiring all Member States to prepare a CAP Strategic Plan, where specific objectives would have to be achieved through targeted actions for improving the economic, social and environmental performance of the agricultural sector and rural areas. The Strategic Plans would aim at providing an opportunity to the Member States to design funding and interventions more targeted to the local needs and situations. The Strategic Plans would also include strengthened advisory systems for farmers supporting knowledge transfer and innovation.

According to the proposal, the new conditionality would link farmers' income support to the application of environment- and climate-friendly farming practices. Moreover, agri-environment-climate commitments and eco-schemes would also be important elements of the CAP Strategic Plans and would support farmers in maintaining and enhancing sustainable farming methods going beyond mandatory requirements and relevant conditions. At least 30% of each rural development national allocation would have to be dedicated to environmental and climate measures with the possibility of higher EU contribution in the funding. The new eco-scheme measures, which are to be defined by the Member States and to be funded from national direct payment allocations, would also address the environmental and climate objectives of the CAP.

Sustainable nutrient and drought management are highly challenging issues in the Danube River Basin (DRB) and need to be addressed. Nutrient pressure from agricultural diffuse sources could increase and affect the status of surface waters, groundwater and the Black Sea. In the context of climate change, the duration and magnitude of drought events are forecast to be increasing in summer months. Such extreme weather conditions could trigger serious water scarcity issues. The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) as the coordinating body for transboundary water management in the DRB is committed to assist Danube countries with addressing these challenges.

Therefore, the ICPDR:

- *welcomes* the efforts of the CAP legislative proposal to enhance the environmental and climate performance of agriculture and emphasises the importance of CAP's contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the WFD, the Nitrates Directive and other related environmental legislation by including them in its enhanced conditionality.
- is *convinced* that the development of effective and sustainable management options requires a strong involvement and cooperation of the agricultural and water sectors, and therefore *calls* for a partnership-dialogue to develop a cross-sectoral and mutual understanding of needs, expectations and constrains of both, the agriculture and the water sector. This desirable dialogue

can lead to joint actions, which can be beneficial for water and the aquatic environment, while keeping the needs of the agricultural sector in mind.

- *emphasises* the need for synergies between CAP interventions and the measures identified in the River Basin Management Plans in order to trigger efficient nutrient management, to avoid water scarcity and to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the WFD.
- is *convinced* that the active and early involvement of environmental authorities in Member States as well as taking environmental knowledge and planning tools (e.g. River Basin Management Plans) into closer consideration could support the design of relevant and effective CAP Strategic Plans.
- *supports* the proposed CAP Strategic Plans as appropriate policy tools to implement financial instruments and targeted measures in order to decouple agricultural production from water pollution and water scarcity caused by agriculture so that a sound development of agriculture is ensured and the environmental objectives in the DRB and the Black Sea coastal areas are achieved in a cost-effective manner.
- *considers* the CAP proposal of applying targeted instruments and tools to assist farmers in an efficient use of fertilizers at farm level adjusted to crop nutrient demand and soil nutrient content beneficial, *appreciates* the appropriate national tools already in place and *expresses* its availability for supporting Danube countries if an update or implementation of such tools is needed.
- *supports* using instruments to compensate income forgone and additional costs of farmers resulting from the implementation of the WFD going beyond relevant conditionality and encourages Member States to make use of this form of support in their CAP Strategic Plans.
- *welcomes* enhanced efforts on education, training, cooperation, innovation and better information systems (Farm Advisory Services integrated within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) to be provided for farmers to improve the economic as well as the ecological performance of land managers especially in the context of an efficient nutrient and water management.
- *emphasizes* that the proposed CAP Strategic Plans should encourage farm advisory services to support farmers in improving the overall sustainable management of their holdings. The strengthened advisory services should be able to deliver up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by research and innovation, as well as to familiarise farmers to the obligations emanating from the Statutory Management Requirements of the conditionality system (e.g. Nitrates, Water Framework and Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directives).
- *stresses* that the effective implementation of the measures in the WFD Programs of Measures, which go beyond the legal requirements and obligations of the Nitrates Directive have to be accompanied by a supportive agricultural funding regime, which takes into account different circumstances in different countries and regions. The involvement of the EU at each stage of the CAP strategic planning, setting rules, assessing plans, monitoring progress and ensuring delivery is highly important and needs to be coupled with an ambitious national planning, targeted measures and appropriate knowledge and information sharing.
- *supports* the tailor-made design of measures on the national level within the CAP Strategic Plans according to specific needs and *encourages* Member States to take into account their agricultural structures, different farm sizes, favourable and less favourable areas, environmental impacts and potential administrative burden when designing and implementing measures.
- *emphasises* its readiness to support Member States in the process of needs assessment and the creation of synergies across Danube countries in order to jointly design coherent measures that respond to common pressures in the Danube River Basin.

The ICPDR strongly supports the efforts to be made for achieving sustainable agriculture thus ensuring the profitability of agriculture and the vitality of rural areas, to safeguard water resources and to achieve and maintain good status of ground- and surface water resources. The ICPDR is willing to contribute to the national CAP Strategic Plans of the Danube countries by highlighting the potential of effective funding mechanisms and instruments for improving nutrient and drought management practices and by transferring relevant knowledge and best practice examples to the Danube countries.

In line with the EC initiative of aligning water and agricultural policies in the CAP the ICPDR has launched a dialogue with the agricultural sector aiming at the development of a guidance document on sustainable agriculture. The guidance will offer Danube countries support for the preparation and implementation of the national agro-environmental policies, CAP Strategic Plans and relevant strategies of the River Basin Management Plans. It will provide a consistent policy framework with a set of recommended instruments and tools to facilitate national water and agricultural decision making and to identify common goals, set up tailor-made policies and implement joint actions and cost-effective measures.