

Pollution, public health: quality of bathing water (repeal. Directive 76/160/EEC)

2002/0254(COD) - 21/04/2005 - `-${summary.subTitle}`

The committee adopted the report by Jules MAATEN (ALDE, NL) amending the Council's common position under the 2nd reading of the codecision procedure. A number of amendments focused on new elements introduced by the Council:

- a fourth, intermediate, category for bathing water standards ("sufficient quality"). The committee wanted to stick to the original classifications laid down by the Commission: "excellent quality", "good quality" and "poor quality". It therefore deleted references to the new category, arguing that it would not improve the 1976 directive nor would it meet the minimum standards laid down by the World Health Organisation;

- mandatory application of the new classification scheme to be deferred until 2015. As the Commission had originally suggested 5 years after the directive's entry into force, the committee felt that 2015 was far too late. It set the new date for achieving at least "good quality" status, as well as the chemical water status objectives laid down in the Water Framework Directive, at the end of the 2011 bathing season;

- a distinction between inland waters and coastal waters. The committee voted to abolish this distinction and reinstate the relevant provisions of the original Commission proposal;

- limiting the provisions on emergency plans. The committee reinstated Article 12 of the original Commission proposal, laying down detailed binding requirements such as emergency plans, surveillance and rapid response systems to cope with emergency situations. It also retabled a 1st reading amendment calling for the public to be clearly informed of potential hazards, in the event of an emergency, through temporary warning signs at the beach.

As well as amending the new elements to be found in the common position, the committee also reinstated various amendments to the original proposal adopted by Parliament at 1st reading:

- as part of a more user-friendly approach to information, Commission-approved symbols should be prominently displayed to inform the public about the current quality of bathing water at any particular site. The Commission should develop within two years "a simple standardised system of symbols" to be used by public authorities and tourist offices as a means to indicate water quality. The system should be made available on an EU website;

- if a bathing area has been removed from the list of bathing waters, the public should be informed of this fact through warning signs at the beach;

- information disseminated by the Member States should include at least an English and French translation;

- the results of water inspections should be available on the internet within a week;

- the directive should be reviewed by 2020, "with particular regard to the parameters for bathing water quality".