

# A COMPREHENSIVE EU WATER POLICY



## By Brenda Azzopardi

Way back in 2000 the widely-fragmented EU water policy prompted the Member States to streamline the provisions which covered issues ranging from flood management to groundwater protection and urban waste water in force at the time, through the introduction of the Water Framework Directive – a single overarching strategy. Going one step further, last June the European Parliament approved a draft directive on the environmental quality standards for water that called for tighter controls of the existing 41 dangerous chemical substances found in European bathing water.

These dangerous chemicals include lead, mercury and nickel. The European Environment Agency had already set up a monitoring system known as the Water Information System for Europe (WISE), mainly meant for experts, to provide complete information on the quality of water. Yet, in July the Agency felt the need to launch a website to provide updated information to the general public on the quality of the bathing water in the thousands of beaches found in Europe.

A 'traffic light' system for EU citizens was set up to facilitate a common gauge; showing a red light for polluted waters, a green light for clean ones and a yellow light that indicates inadequate monitoring. Beach visitors are now being asked to leave their comments online regarding the water quality of the resorts they visit, in order to facilitate the distribution of more information to the general public. In addition, Water Watch, the name of the website, will eventually also offers easy-access to a database on the quality of soil, air and ozone.

However, the fact that such information depends highly on data

submitted by the national authorities is often perceived as a major drawback. A report published in 2007 hinted that the European Commission suspects that Member States are not providing a faithful list of bathing sites for EU monitoring purposes, in order to avoid the need to give details of the pollution problems present in some of their bathing sites.

This five-year project is another initiative by agencies from the European Union to enhance the sharing of information among citizens all over Europe.

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**Malta-EU Steering  
& Action Committee**