

## Commission seeks to tackle droughts and water shortages

By Emily Smith

**The European Commission next Wednesday (18 July) will ask Europeans to rethink the way they use and conserve water.**

The 'water scarcity and droughts' communication will set out existing EU drought management tools, including the overarching water framework directive and the emergency civil protection mechanism.

It will ask member states to consider the costs and benefits of other water management possibilities, including whether water pricing for consumers affects use.

It will also look at the role of the Common Agricultural Policy in drought prevention. The Commission estimates that the agricultural sector today consumes around 69% of water in Europe.

The document will be modelled on a 2004 communication on floods, which started talks on a co-ordinated EU flood management plan. This communication was followed in 2005 by a proposal for a directive.

But Sergey Moroz of WWF, the conservation group, said that there was no need for more legislation to deal with droughts. "We already have the water framework directive," he said. "That is flexible enough to deal with both too much and too little water."

The framework directive sets environmental standards for water management and quality.

Moroz said that he hoped the droughts communication would encourage member states to think about "managing water supply, rather than increasing water demand. We need to really look at reducing pipe leakages," he said, "at the water pricing systems and at savings measures. Rather than just immediately thinking 'we don't have enough water, let's transfer some from somewhere else'."

Moroz added that EU water policy should follow the same approach as the energy policy being promoted by the Commission, under which savings are seen as a way of avoiding an increase in energy imports.

Ingeborg Bromée of Copa-Cogeca, the European farmers' association, said that water conservation was a huge challenge and that the agriculture sector had an important role to play.

But she warned against trying to find a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to water use on farms. Although agriculture makes up 90% of water consumption in parts of southern Europe, she said, in the north it is well behind the amount of water used by industry and households and could fall to 2%.

Bromée said that using water wisely was a priority for the farmers' association. "We already have a number of water efficiency projects under way, many as part of rural development programmes," she said.

"But it is not always appropriate to talk at an EU level about this topic," added Bromée, "you have to remember all the regional and sectoral differences."