

## Water: Difficulties with Framework Directive

In March 1999, the EU Council of Ministers adopted a common position on a proposal to promote a genuine EU water policy, which it was hoped could be speedily finalised and forwarded to the European Parliament.

Progress has now been postponed, so the common position will not be forwarded to the Parliament before September and that newly-elected body is unlikely to consider the matter before October. This means that there will be no second-reading vote before November or December. It will therefore be the job of the Portuguese Presidency to take up this matter in the first half of next year.

At the moment, the main difficulties are:

- The price of water: Article 12 of the proposal contemplates a process for recovering the cost of services. The problem here is that no Member State currently makes consumers pay the real price. In most countries, the farming industry gets its water free of charge and to change this situation would, *inter alia*, obviously affect the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy.
- International obligations: How to use a Community proposal to reflect its international obligations (for example, under OSPAR and the North Sea Conventions, involv-

ing a total phase out of dumping dangerous substances at sea by 2020). The Parliament wants these commitments to be turned into an obligation in the Framework Directive. The Member States still cannot agree on this matter.

- Period for implementing the Directive and exemptions: The Council agreed on a maximum of 19 years for implementing the Directive in full, whereas the Commission, backed by the Parliament, proposed 12 years.
- Extensively modified bodies of water: The Commis-

sion proposed incorporating these into the Directive so as to return to the most natural situation possible. It now has to be decided what is meant exactly by extensively modified bodies of water (channelled rivers) and determine which bodies might have been or may be involved.

The Council and the Parliament disagree strongly about this issue, with the MEPs wanting the Directive to cover a series of stretches of water that the Member States do not want to be included.