



German Ichthyological Society
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The German Ichthyological Society signs the declaration "Europe's biological diversity depends on healthy freshwater ecosystems"

We, the undersigned German Ichthyological Society, stand for the preservation of the EU clean water law, the Water Framework Directive as described in more detail in the following text.

Dr. Fabian Herder

President of the German Ichthyological Society (*Gesellschaft für Ichthyologie e.V.*)

Declaration - Europe's biodiversity depends on healthy freshwater ecosystems

We, the undersigned scientists including our society, stand for the preservation of the EU clean water law, the Water Framework Directive.

Freshwater ecosystems are the heart of nature, flowing through and connecting different ecosystems together, from deserts to mountains. Rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater aquifers, and ponds, in addition to housing rich biodiversity, provide a wide array of nature's contributions to us humans, from mitigating the impacts of floods, to supporting ecotourism and agricultural activities.

Yet, freshwater ecosystems are amongst the most threatened on the planet. Worldwide, freshwater biodiversity has declined by 80% in the last decades. In Europe specifically, 60% of surface waters are currently not in good status and freshwater species are also amongst the most threatened in Europe. European wetlands, which serve as natural carbon sinks, have decreased by 50% since the 1970s. All this

has made freshwater fish and amphibians amongst the most vulnerable threatened endemic European species. Their severe decline is a major threat for fulfilling any biodiversity targets in the future.

With our freshwater ecosystems under multiple pressures, their natural ability to regulate the quality, quantity and timing of freshwater is impeded and they can no longer provide nature's contribution to people that we desperately need in the present, and which will be even more needed in the near future.

With the increasing risk and rise in Europe of droughts, floods, wildfires - as experienced this summer - resilient water ecosystems are becoming more vital than ever. Healthy surface and groundwater bodies are absolutely crucial to help us cope with these events.

The EU, in 2000, adopted the EU Water Framework Directive, an integrated and holistic environmental legislation. The Directive was designed to ensure that we will have healthy and resilient freshwater bodies to support people and nature, today and in the future.

The strength of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) lies in:

- *Its holistic approach of integrating all parts of the wider environment as well as economic and social systems, which is essential for the success of any water management efforts.*
- *The economic potential of full WFD implementation goes beyond the implementation costs of the directive, as it needs to account for the social, public health, and cultural benefits of having healthy freshwater ecosystems.*
- *The effectiveness of the WFD, as is the case for any EU environmental regulation, depends upon its practical implementation by the Member States. When implemented, the Directive, since 2000, has led to some positive results, from the decrease of pollution with a number of harmful substances, such as lead and nickel, to specific successful restoration cases.*
- *For further improvements in water quality and quantity to be achieved, implementation needs a new impetus in Member States and from the European Commission. Acknowledging the holistic and systemic intent of the Directive is required in its implementation, for it to deliver its full potential.*

In the light of this year's IPBES report on global biodiversity loss, the time is now for Member States to implement and for the new European Commission to enforce the EU's existing nature laws, such as the EU Water Framework Directive, to halt and reverse this catastrophic trend.

We, the undersigned scientists, stand with the 375K European citizens who want the Member States and the European Commission to focus on enforcing environmental regulations rather than weakening them.

We urge Member States and urge this new European Commission to preserve the Water Framework Directive in its current form, as the key to ensuring that freshwater ecosystems and all the ecosystems they feed are healthy and resilient for nature and people.

There cannot be an effective European Green Deal without healthy water ecosystems at the heart of it.