



EUWMA declaration: Climate adaptation in local water management

EUWMA members are national associations of local and regional water boards. These organizations are authorized by national and regional laws to perform water management tasks, including water supply, wastewater treatment and discharge, flood and coastal protection, water quality management, drainage regulation, and irrigation. In a broader sense, these boards can also be considered responsible for the protection of the environment, biodiversity, and wetlands.

EUWMA members represent public local and regional water management organizations from 10 EU member states, covering a surface of more than millions of hectares of cultivated land in the interest of their customers and/or members i.e. diverse private and public entities. Water boards are in many regions of the EU essential for the development and the economy of rural areas; in some areas for hundreds of years.

1. Climate change and impact on local water management:

Climate change causes a detrimental risk to the future of all citizens in the European Union. The great impact of climate change is also clearly experienced in local water management by all EUWMA members. Although the effects and impacts of climate change differ throughout Europe, the weather patterns and temperatures definitely changed significantly. Urgent climate action is needed to avoid accelerating changes in weather patterns. Droughts and heatwaves have become more and more frequent, temperature rise modifying seasonality and plant growth patterns, and drought is more and more frequently followed by disastrous extreme rainfall. With as an important result that, all too often, too little or too much water, sometimes in a short amount of time, causes great challenges for good water management.

2. Water safety:

EUWMA also stresses the link between climate adaptation and water safety. Climate change will continue to increase the risk of floods and therefore also negatively impacts the water safety of all EU citizens. It needs to be stated that both floods and drought also harm water quality, making it more difficult to reach the goals of the Water Framework Directive. To reduce these risks of floods to a minimum, climate adaptation measures and improvement of water governance are key.

3. Drought:

The unprecedented frequency of droughts and water scarcity, often followed by flash floods, is alarming. This climatic change especially causes severe problems for farmers, industry, nature, and the drinking water supply. Droughts make clear that water must be retained and harvested where



and when it falls, by water infrastructures and natural solutions all along the watershed. It is necessary to increase saving water in combination with other solutions such as water reclamation, modernization of irrigation infrastructures, and desalination techniques. There is an urgent need to raise awareness. Too many communities and economic sectors around Europe are not yet prepared to manage water scarcity spells efficiently. We need a robust forecast at a finer scale, tools for planning regulation, and funding to accelerate the change to a drought-resilient society.

4. Climate adaptation solutions:

Climate adaptation requires local measures and changes in the management of the water system, in both urban and rural areas. More specifically, better water retention in soil and in water storage infrastructures, and water efficiency measures are needed in combination with more flexible water management practices, adapted to water availability. 'Building with nature' is of course highly desirable as a starting point. However, technical measures taken by local water managers alone will not be enough to create a resilient water system. To better cope with the effects of climate change on water management, we need a systemic societal transformation. All societal actors need to take their share of responsibility in the climate adaptation process.

5. Resilient governance structure:

EUWMA believes that a good resilient water governance structure is key for a climate-resilient water system. All actors in the water cycle should be in good contact with each other and aim to work together. Real-time data sharing on all governance layers, including the European Union, is key in order to have a good understanding and prioritization of all risks. Water boards carry out their legally defined public water management tasks. They should therefore be closely consulted by political decisions and policy-making leaders in relation to climate adaptation and spatial planning, which has an impact on water.

6. Investments in climate adaptation:

EUWMA believes that climate adaptation measures require significant additional funding, investments, and substantial changes in the physical environment. Times of crisis and recovery ask for a reorientation of public investments. Now is the moment to do so and we need to opt for our natural capital and natural resources, such as water, soil, habitat, and biodiversity.

7. Better cross-coordination:

Water is a cross-border common good. The impacts of climate change are therefore also cross-border, between countries and between and beyond administrative borders. Better coordination between local, regional, and national governments is crucial when it comes to climate adaptation actions and strategies. Water boards must be included from the very early stages in the design of these strategies and taken seriously as key strategic partners for measures to transition in a climate-resilient Europe.

8. Adaptation as a 'No-Regret' action:

Climate adaptation is a 'no-regret' option. It offers triple dividends; preventing loss of human life, material, and nature; generating economic growth by reducing risk; social, cultural, and natural added value. It is necessary to act now to be resilient in the future. If we want to avoid maladaptation, climate adaptation measures in relation to water management should aim for



integrated, long-term planning suitable for multiple pathways. Adaptation is needed to become resilient and goes hand in hand with climate mitigation measures and become a climate-neutral society.