Conclusions

1. Water Directors (WD) of European Union\(^1\), EFTA countries\(^2\) and the Commission met to discuss the challenges around the preparation of 2021 and future RBMPs.
2. WD recalled the usefulness of the Water Framework Directive as an important positive driver to achieve sustainable water management. They recognise the benefits that implementation has already brought to water management and water quality across the EU.
3. WD reiterate their support to keep the level of ambition of the WFD.
4. WD took note of the plans from the Commission to review the WFD by mid-2019 and the intention to bring forward proposals to be effectively implemented before 2027, with the aim of maintaining a framework for continuing ambitious implementation beyond that date.
5. WD agree to work together to avoid the risk of Member States considering themselves to have no other legal option than to rely on setting less stringent objectives under article 4(5) in the 2021 RBMP for water bodies for which it would be feasible to achieve good status in the longer term.\(^3\) WD consider that this use of 4(5) in 2021 RBMP may bring as a consequence that the objectives and therefore the overall level of ambition are actually lowered. WD are committed to explore options to keep the level of ambition in the 2021 to 2027 period and beyond.
6. WD agree that article 4(4) can still be applied in the 2021 RBMP and committed to continue the discussion including the following elements:
   a. clarification on the use of 4(4) and 4(5) in future RBMP
   b. natural conditions are a legitimate reason under article 4(4) to extend the deadline beyond 2027 and WD agree that it would be useful to further clarify this concept within the CIS process
7. WD agree that they will continue the discussion at the next meeting in Bratislava with a view to agree on further steps including on how the results of the discussion process can be transformed into a reliable basis for river basin management planning by MS
8. WD agree to step up the efforts to better integrate WFD in other sectoral EU policies.

---

\(^1\) Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the European Commission and the EEA. Absent: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Portugal and Slovenia.

\(^2\) Norway. Absent: Iceland and Switzerland.

\(^3\) WD also note that the Commission’s recalls that article 4(5) is a derogation of a most exceptional character given that it involves setting less stringent objectives. It may only be used by Member States under the strict conditions therein.