

Waste water treatment in Germany exemplary within the EU

The next task is to reduce water pollution by agriculture

Germany has achieved one of the important goals set by the EU waste water directive of 1991. The German Federal Government has reported to the European Commission that the input of nutrients into flowing water bodies has now been reduced: phosphorous by 90 percent and nitrogen by 76.5 percent. "That means that we have significantly surpassed the targets set by the EU, particularly in the case of phosphorous," said Federal Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin. Local authorities have by and large done the homework they were given. If we are to continue to reduce the nutrient pollution of water bodies, our priority must now be to minimize diffuse input, particularly from agriculture, the Environment Minister went on to say.

Germany's successes in waste water treatment and its ten years of experience in implementing the Directive cannot hide the fact that enormous challenges had to be met, not only in the "new" states (of the former East Germany) but also in the "old" states. "The expansion of waste water disposal facilities in Germany is not yet complete. We have to construct new urban waste water treatment plants and collection systems or upgrade the old ones, particularly in the states in the East of the country and in more sparsely populated rural areas," said Jürgen Trittin.

In the report it recently published on the implementation of the European waste water directive, the European Commission comes to the conclusion that a successful implementation of the Directive is possible, as the examples of Denmark, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands have demonstrated. The efforts made to date have brought about a clear improvement in water quality. The Commission notes: "Germany and Austria have fulfilled the requirements of the Directive in virtually all respects." The findings of the report show that although, generally speaking, improvements have been achieved in the European Union, there are still huge delays in many Member States, for example in the designation of so-called sensitive areas. For the 10 new Member States, the implementation of the Directive will require an enormous effort and entail significant costs. All the new Member States have therefore been granted transition periods.