

## EP WATER GROUP

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## Report on the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EP Water group, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012 “Water priorities of the Danish Presidency”



The 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EP Water Group was dedicated to the EU water policy challenges from the perspective of the Danish presidency. The opening of the meeting was warmly welcomed by the host of the meeting – **Mr. Richard SEEBER, the President of EP Water Group** indicating that the group is an open platform to discuss various challenging water-related topics and highlighting the needs not only greening but also blueing of the European economy. The Danish presidency is putting a very high priority to the actions linked to the green Europe, as promoting transition to a green economy, climate change and energy targets, and better regulation of chemicals. All these actions have an enormous impact to the aquatic environment and to water resources to everyone’s needs.

**The key note speaker was Ms. Ida AUKEN** – Environmental Minister of Denmark. The minister highlighted the importance of water as the most important issue of coming years, and as a hot topic besides the oil and other natural resources. She underlined that besides the economic

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crisis the other crisis as climate and resource are as severe as economic crisis and all the crises have to be addressed equally and the challenges solved together. No improved competitiveness without a substantial improvement in resource efficiency in a broad sense including efficiency in water.

The meeting was extremely successful well attended with more than 115 participants from a wide range of organizations and European institutions with high interest in water. The representatives from EP, including the main representatives from the EC DG ENV – two water units, various stakeholders, European associations including **EUREAU president Mr. Carl – Emil LARSEN** (the EP water group managing body), NGOs and others.



## Ms. Ida AUKEN

Danish Minister of Environment

## Water priorities of the Danish Presidency



### Opening: The two crises must be solved together

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen! It is an honour and a pleasure to speak to you today about the Danish water priorities under the Danish EU presidency. The Danish Presidency is determined to work in a very close cooperation with you. If we really want to make a difference on the environmental agenda, ***we need to cooperate on all levels and to join forces*** with other and bigger players. ***This must be a joint venture.***

Our ambitions are high though we are fully aware that the European Economies are currently stuck by a financial crisis which is threatening the entire European economy. This is of course a very difficult starting point for the Danish Presidency, but I am convinced that the answer to the present crisis is ***not a business as usual scenario***. The EU is not only stuck by the financial crisis. ***The EU and the rest of the world are also faced with a climate and resource crisis. And the crises are mutually interlinked and must be solved coherently.***

***No solution of the economic crisis without renewed economic growth and job creation. No economic growth and job creation in Europe without improved competitiveness – and no improved competitiveness without a substantial improvement in resource efficiency.***

And improved resource efficiency will not only improve the competitiveness and profit of European business. The efficient use of resources is also the way forward towards sustainable management of our natural resources – and here I am not only talking about energy resources. ***I am talking about resources in a broad sense: energy, raw materials, soil, air, biodiversity and of course water.***

If we want to put the finances on a sustainable track I truly believe that a ***green transformation of the economy*** is not only the right way to go – but also ***the necessary way to go.***

***We need to develop a new green approach*** that can pave the way towards a resource efficient, green economy in Europe.

***We need a policy framework -***

- A framework to create coherence and integration of the policies that shapes our economy and our lifestyle.
- A framework that can create the playing field where innovation and resource efficiency is rewarded.

Where ***economic opportunities and enhanced security of supply of resources are created through***

- ***smart regulation,***
- ***product design,***
- ***eco-innovation,***
- ***sustainable management of our natural capital,***
- ***increased recycling, recovery and substitution of materials and resource savings.***

These areas are indeed key areas of our environment policy.

For the Danish Presidency it is a ***key priority to make the environmental policy a central player in a green transition of the European economy.***

- The water policy has a key role in this green transition of the European economy.
- Clean water is a vital prerequisite for life itself.
- If we proceed with a business as usual scenario the humanity's the demand for clean water supply could surpass the prevailing resource by as much as 40 percent by 2030. This, I find very concerning.

***Drought and water shortage is still one of the main reasons for hunger catastrophes in Africa*** - as we see it right now in East Africa. And shortage of water was one of the main reasons for the food crisis in 2008 – and still it is one of the main barriers for production of biomass. In 2030 it is expected that 50 % of the world's population will live in regions with water shortage.

***Huge investments in water infrastructure and water savings are needed,*** and the global investments the water sector is expected to increase from 190 billion euro in 2006 to 480 billion euro in 2020 – a growth rate at 6 % per year.

***And water shortage is seen as one of the main obstacles for future growth in China.*** Therefore, water has become the top priority in China's new five year development plan.

**EU is among the leaders in the water technology** - but even in the EU there is great potential to do better. As it is now 20 to 40 percent of water spent in the EU is wasted and according to the *Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe* the water efficiency could be improved by 40 percent through technological improvements alone. These numbers speaks for them self.

An **improved approach for a sustainable management of water resources** requires close coordination of policies on agriculture, transport, regional development and energy as well as effective and fair water pricing as required by the Water Framework Directive. It is very obvious to me that changes in ecosystems, land use, in production and water consumption and re-use patterns could cost-effectively reduce the scarcity of the water resources.

During the Danish Presidency I will use all opportunities to move forward this agenda: in the Council with the framework of a 7th Environmental Action Programme, in the Rio+20 process and bilaterally. I will maintain a clear focus on how to make access to clean water a top priority in the EU resource policy.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Program (EU/regional level)

The 7th EAP holds the potential of **building a bridge between the Europe 2020 strategy towards a green economy for Europe** and the environment policy underlining the close connection between the fundamental services that nature and the environment provides for the economy. Environmental policy is among the main drivers for a more resource efficient economy in many sectors – including agriculture.

Because of Danish and EU water policies the Danish farmers have managed to reduce the loss of nitrate with 50 % since 1985 and reduced the use of chemical fertilizer with more than 50%. And still the production of food has continued to grow. This illustrates how efficiently regulation can support and stimulate the development of environment friendly technology and production patterns to the benefit of economic growth and the environment.

I welcome the Commissions Roadmap on resource efficiency which should serve as a cornerstone in the 7th EAP. The use and protection of water and other natural resources is identified in the roadmap at the heart of our aspirations to create a wealthy and competitive future Europe. **In this regard we have huge challenges in front of us.**

One of the challenges I look forward to discuss further with my colleagues in the Environment Council – is **how to increase water resource efficiency**. This will be a major topic in the 7th Environmental Action Program and also during the World Water Forum in Marseilles in March and in Rio in June.

## EU Water Policy in council – The Blueprint to safeguard Europe’s Water resources

I am also looking forward to discussing the Commissions Blueprint to safeguard Europe’s water Resources” which is planned to be presented by the end of 2012. I have very high expectations to this Blueprint. The 2010 State of the Environment Report from the European Environment Agency clearly states that the EU Member States haven’t achieved our overall water policy goals. This has to be dealt with now. With this in mind I expect the Blueprint to deliver the necessary policy action in a concrete manner that singles out the needed instruments to ensure a sustainable use of high quality water in the EU - on the long term. As the EU-president and Danish Minister for the Environment I look forward to these highly important coming discussions and negotiations in council this autumn.

Furthermore I will urge the Commission to adopt the **proposal on environment quality standards for priority substances in the aquatic environment**. This has regrettably been delayed but I still expect it to be high on the agenda during the Danish Presidency. If this dossiers soon will be adopted the Danish presidency will bring it as far as possible in the council and hopefully to a political agreement in the council at the meeting in June.



## Rio+20 (global action)

Neither Denmark nor the EU can safeguard the world’s water supplies alone. We need to gather more allies to reduce water pollution and ensure clean drinking water for everyone. To me the Rio+20 Conference provides a unique opportunity for the world community to make concrete and ambitious commitments on sustainable development issues. EU is a driving force in this respect, pushing for a greening of the economy via the central proposition of a UN green economy roadmap. We need concrete and ambitious goals and actions agreed in Rio in June.

The EU must take a lead on this issue. And the Rio-declaration is very clear on the need to act stating that **all people on earth have the right to sustainable development** including the equal right to resources



and access to the commons. *Clean water being one of them.*

The scarcity and access to clean water is a one example of a focus area that calls upon the attention from the international society. Global action on water policy is highly dependent on the EU-input to the Rio+20 Conference during the Danish Presidency. I hope that we in Rio can agree on how to handle this crisis in terms of specific water goals – especially global goals – and concrete actions in order to reach these goals on increasing water efficiency, access to clean drinking water and the improvement wastewater treatment throughout the world.



Along with my European colleagues, I will do my best to further improve and strengthen the EU's position before the conference. The Danish Presidency intends to prepare environment Council Conclusions in March, discuss Rio+20 at the informal environment ministers meeting in the city of Horsens in Denmark in April and bring Rio+20 to the attention of the European Council.

## Balancing water environment and the agricultural sector

In Rio and in the EU, *we must commit ourselves to ambitious goals to protect our water environment.* But we must also keep in mind the necessity of maintaining a sustainable agricultural sector. I come from a country gifted with numerous watercourses, lakes, fiords and coastal waters, while we at the same time have an intensive agricultural production of more than 60 percent of the total area. This is not an easy job when it comes to sustainable water management.

*An integrated approach* that combines sustainable water management with an economically sustainable agricultural sector

is a necessity for the needed green growth in the EU.

By the early 1990's Denmark introduced a series of Action Plans for the Aquatic Environment. These plans were elaborated in close consultation with the agricultural sector. This was not done without arguments, but we managed to mutually agree on the main targets, and today we see the positive results on nature and environment. And by the end of 2011, Denmark submitted the Danish River Basin Management Plans to the Commission. The plans have proven that it is possible to achieve an even better water environment while at the same time maintaining a sustainable agricultural sector. However, we are still faced with the challenges of climate change. Therefore, we need to find solutions to adapt to periods with water scarcity and periods of flooding.

*Through co-operation and development of new green technologies and new measures it is possible to create sustainable water management solutions while maintaining a productive modern agricultural sector.* We must continuously look for new ways to create sustainable growth and a better protection and more efficient use of natural resources.

Green considerations should be firmly build in to EU sector policies – so-called *“mainstreaming”*. *The integration of environmental focus in other sectors is a very efficient way to ensure a general greening of the economy.*

We want initiatives and milestones in the Commissions Resource Roadmap reflected in the Commissions annual growth survey. The direct agricultural subsidies should, as an example, be made greener, as the Commission also proposes.

We look forward, with high expectations, to conducting the negotiations on the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy and to achieve a genuine lift for the improvement of nature conservation and biodiversity in the EU. It is essential that we make sure that the financial instruments are tailored to meet our needs when implementing for example the Water Framework Directive, the Natura 2000-directives or the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

## Bilateral Corporation - Developing new technologies

We need to develop new partnerships within the EU and we need to develop partnerships with countries outside Europe. One of my top-priorities is *bilateral co-operations*. It is crucial that we share knowhow and technology with each other and especially with the developing countries.

Within the European Union, we have a long tradition of bilateral collaboration in the water sector. Even so, we still need to build even stronger relations in order to achieve benefits from our own knowledge concerning sustainable water management. And we need to build new relations with countries outside the EU.

I have just recently committed Denmark to play a leading role in developing a dialogue-based cooperation on water management and technology development between EU and China as a *new platform under the EU-Water Initiative*.

The ambition is to reach an agreement on a work-program as well as the general structure of the cooperation at the World Water Forum in Marseille in March 2012. In my view, the aim should be to create a platform to gather relevant European and Chinese

players in the water sector. We must strike for a set-up where China and the EU are represented as equal partners in effort to promote the green transition of the economy.

Developing new technologies will enable us to address some of the water challenges we face in all countries today. I will give you an example to illustrate my point. A group of Danish companies has just developed an intelligent sewer system based on radar technology. This new technology will make it possible for the operators of the sewer system to predict and react effectively on unpredicted amounts of rainfall to avoid harmful sewer overflows. This might be one of the many new technologies that should be invented to face the huge challenges that we see in relation to climate changes.

## **Conclusion**

As I said in the beginning: Water is a vital resource and we need to treat it with care. We can't neglect the fact that Europe is challenged by a financial crisis. But Europe – as well as the rest of the World - is also faced by the challenge of an increasing scarcity of natural resources. Water is one of them. And those two crises are closely interconnected. Natural resources make up the backbone of our economy and our well-being - and the future availability and supply of natural resources will define the quality of our future life.

Therefore, let us join forces. Let us co-operate to find the solutions of water supply, wastewater treatment and climate change adaptation. And let us together renew the vision of clean and drinkable water for everybody.

Thank you very much for your attention!

## Questions / Answers and Discussion session

During the discussions, questions and answers session the audience was keen to learn more about how Danish presidency can speed up the initiative on European Innovation Partnership (EIP)<sup>1</sup> on water efficiency urging to be adopted in 2012 and not in 2013 as it is planned in order to go hand in hand with the Water Blueprint and with the new multiannual programming framework implementing EU2020 strategy.

The audience show as well the interest to foster the ratification of the EU UN Watercourses convention<sup>2</sup> in the frame of upcoming Rio+20<sup>3</sup> event in June 2012; to foster and increase the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of resource efficiency agenda, and to ensure the roadmap to work on this agenda in a future.

It was highlighted by the Danish Minister that crisis cannot be managed without the growth, and Europe needs the right growth and the economy close to reality, therefore even addressing resource efficiency it should be done by selecting and implementing new innovative financial concepts. Thus, besides technological innovations Europe needs to implement non-technological ones, greening and blueing economy.

It was also highlighted that regarding the water area a very important aspect and the priority at the EU level is still given to water quality. It was assured that water business is a fast growing sector in the world therefore water industries and water services providers, especially in Denmark, are catching this moment to re-boost economic growth.

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**The President of EP Water Group Dr. Seeber thanked to all for the questions and invited everyone to continue the discussions on the water issues in the next meeting to be held on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012 on the discussions and the debates on the key issues on water as a preparatory Parliamentary and Regional process for 6<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in Marseille.**



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1 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/innovationpartnership/>

2 [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-12&chapter=27&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-12&chapter=27&lang=en)

3 <http://www.unccd2012.org/rio20/>