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Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
(7.1.2026)

The Commission shares the concerns over water scarcity, especially in regions most acutely affected. The Water Framework Directive (WFD)¹ provides a mechanism to balance environmental protection with socio-economic needs. It requires compliance with ecological flows, understood as a flow regime compatible with the achievement of good ecological status. Where ecological flows are not respected, the biological quality elements cannot attain good status, which would be contrary to the environmental objectives set out in Article 4 of the WFD, unless an exemption under Articles 4(4) to 4(7) applies - subject to strict conditions.

The Commission is aware of the relevant case law of the Spanish Supreme Court on this matter. As outlined in the Vision for Agriculture and Food², a steady and safe water supply is key for future-proofing the agri-food sector. The European Water Resilience Strategy (WRS)³ reiterates that access to clean, affordable water is a human right, while recognising the need to curb demand and over-abstractions and to improve water efficiency and reuse to avoid supply disruptions.

As outlined in the WRS, desalination⁴ can be part of the solution to address water scarcity in the most affected regions. Therefore, the EU will support research and innovation towards more sustainable desalination processes in 2026, so as to reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gases emissions, and environmental impacts. However, as stressed in the Recommendation on guiding principles of water efficiency first⁵, published concomitantly, increasing water supply should be the last resort: reducing consumption, enhancing water efficiency, and reusing water should be prioritised, when possible.

¹ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1–73, as amended by Commission Directive 2014/101/EU of 30 October 2014, OJ L 311, 31.10.2014, p. 32–35.

² Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Vision for Agriculture and Food Shaping together an attractive farming and agri-food sector for future generations, COM/2025/75 final.

³ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/environment/water-resilience-strategy_en.

⁴ if done sustainably.

⁵ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/commission-recommendation-water-efficiency-first-guiding-principles_en.