

EN

P-001419/2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Šefčovič
on behalf of the European Commission
(16.8.2024)

1. The Commission does not formally declare the state of droughts of any region. This falls within the competence of the Member States depending on their national criteria. Furthermore, a 'long-term drought' status has no EU level official definition. The Commission supports Member States in detecting and monitoring the evolutions of droughts through the European Drought Observatory¹ as well as through the EU working group on water scarcity and drought².

2. Any possibilities of deploying nature-based solutions and regional engagement against water scarcity should be explored to increase resilience against frequent extreme weather events like droughts, such as through the EU Missions 'Restore our Ocean and Waters' and 'Adaptation to Climate Change'³. Sicilian partners are actively engaged in the Mission Ocean and Waters with more than 10 Sicilian cities and local authorities as well as a coalition of mayors having endorsed the Mission Charter.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)⁴ provides for a range of instruments to support relevant activities in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. In case of occurring unforeseeable circumstances, the rules of a number of EU funds provide for the concept of force majeure and exceptional circumstances⁵. The EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF)⁶ can only be activated at the request of an affected eligible State. The EUSF may cover a part of the costs for emergency and recovery operations incurred by public authorities. This means, for example, the recovery of essential infrastructure, provision of temporary accommodation to the population, cleaning-up operations and protection of the cultural heritage.

Member States have also the possibility to grant State aid in accordance with EU State aid rules. Specifically, aid to make good the damage caused by an adverse climatic event such as a severe drought could be granted by the Member State to the affected farmers. Under the conditions specified in Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2472, this State aid would be exempted from notification because it would be compatible with the internal market⁷.

¹ <https://drought.emergency.copernicus.eu/>

² https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/9ab5926d-bed4-4322-9aa7-9964bbe8312d/library/26651f83-ccab-4ed2-b8cb-831ff340df47?p=1&n=10&sort=modified_DESC

³ The EU Missions 'Restore our Ocean and Waters' and 'Adaptation to Climate Change' include relevant actions (for example through area-based 'lighthouses' in the Mediterranean area, including Sicily, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/mediterranean-lighthouse-gains-momentum-mission-ocean-and-waters-event-palermo-2023-05-31_en). The Missions however do not include provisions aimed at tackling acute responses to disasters.

⁴ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy_en

⁵ For example, cf. Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2116. The Commission also clarified that force majeure may excuse an operator from certain legal consequences which would normally result from non-compliance with an obligation. The application of force majeure is the responsibility of Member States (Communication from the Commission to the Council on force majeure, COM/2024/225 final).

⁶ Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund as amended, OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3.

⁷ Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2472 of 14 December 2022 declaring certain categories of aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles

3. The Water Framework Directive (WFD)⁸ already allows a temporary derogation from the non-deterioration obligation in circumstances which are exceptional or could not reasonably have been foreseen, in particular extreme floods and prolonged droughts, pursuant to Article 4(6) of the WFD. Together with Member States in the framework of the working group on water scarcity and drought, the Commission has been also recently reviewing the Common Implementation Strategy Guidance Document 24 on river basin management in a changing climate⁹.

107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ L 327, 21.12.2022, p. 1.

⁸ 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, as amended by Commission Directive 2014/101/EU of 30 October 2014, OJ L 311, 31.10.2014, p. 32–35.

⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3a9009e1-d00d-4ff3-b674-8ad2b6207f23/language-en>