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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Šefčovič
on behalf of the European Commission
(6.11.2024)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD)¹ requires Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that all surface water bodies achieve good ecological and good chemical status and do not deteriorate status. Good ecological status is determined by the status of its biological quality elements, including fish. Temperature limits are part of the general physico-chemical quality elements supporting the good ecological status. There are no EU benchmarks for setting limits, these are set in national legislation. Limit values should be set so as to allow biological quality elements to achieve good status. The higher the water temperature, the less oxygen in water. Both can have chronic and acute effects².

Pursuant to the WFD, Member States shall establish controls on activities affecting water bodies, such as discharges from nuclear power plants. Controls shall be regularly reviewed and, where so required, updated. In this revision the increasing temperature of the Danube as a result of climate change must be taken into account³. This may require setting stricter temperature limit values on discharges if necessary to avoid deterioration of status. The 2024 European Climate Risk Assessment⁴ found that the climatic risks to aquatic ecosystems are already substantial and require more action at the aggregate EU level.

The Commission will, before the end of 2024, publish its report on the assessment of the River Basin Management Plans, which Member States have to report every six years, in accordance with the WFD. In this context, the Commission will pay particular attention to the appropriate classification of water bodies and implementation of controls on activities affecting water bodies.

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.

² Kelly, M., Teixeira, H., Lyche Solheim, A., Free, G., Phillips, G., Salas Herrero, M.F., Kolada, A., Varbiro, G. and Poikane, S., Physico-chemical criteria to support Good Ecological Status in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, doi:10.2760/355815, JRC136407.

³ Guidance No 24 - River Basin Management in a Changing Climate:

<https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/9ab5926d-bed4-4322-9aa7-9964bbe8312d/library/b5f4eff8-2482-4494-9df0-e72cb8792e19/details>

⁴ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-climate-risk-assessment>