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The Water Framework Directive and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive: Exploring the linkages

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Abstract

This paper highlights, explores and reflects on the linkages between the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The assessment of river basin management plans (RBMPs), the key procedural linkage between the two Directives, is addressed. The assessment of other actions affecting the water environment, particularly land use plans, could also aid the achievement of the aims of the Water Framework Directive. As water quality is related intimately to the development and use of land, this significant issue is considered. There are numerous potential benefits that could arise from exploring the linkages between these two pieces of EU environmental legislation. These are highlighted, and include encouraging resource savings, generating a holistic approach to water resource management and ultimately the promotion of more sustainable forms of development.

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the linkages between two of the most significant environmental Directives to come from Europe in recent years; the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The [European Commission \(2001a\)](#) has stated that the SEA Directive should be taken into account when implementing the WFD. The key procedural requirement of the WFD is the preparation of river basin management plans (RBMPs), an action that will fall under the remit of the SEA Directive, therefore triggering the application of SEA during RBMP preparation.

The WFD advocates the integration of its requirements, which relate to improving water quality, into other EU and domestic policies within the European member states. Land use planning is a key arena where this should take place. There exists an early and important opportunity to integrate the ethos of the WFD within planning systems via assessment procedures undertaken during the preparation of land use plans, which are also covered by the SEA Directive. This would enable significant problem areas concerning water quality to be identified, and for land use plans (and other plans falling within the scope of the SEA Directive that affect water quality) to consider the requirements of the WFD during their preparation. Land use planning policies could subsequently be developed to encourage the protection of the water environment, therefore assisting the achievement of the WFD's key goal; to ensure the 'good status' of most of Europe's waters by 2015. This paper identifies and discusses the points of integration between land use planning, achieving the objectives of the WFD and undertaking SEA procedures.

The following discussion performs several valuable functions. Specifically, the paper will raise awareness of linkages between the WFD and the SEA Directive, helping to reduce the unnecessary waste of resources and duplication of effort that could arise from considering the implementation of the two Directives in isolation. Moreover, if applied in practice, insights contained within this paper should encourage environment improvements to be made, particularly in the water sector. Crucially, the successful integration of the requirements of the WFD and the SEA Directive, and the corresponding achievement of their respective objectives, could assist in the realisation of goals related to sustainable development, which is a key overarching aim of both Directives and European environmental policy more generally.

This paper principally considers river basin planning and the management of water resources. Nevertheless, the discussion is also relevant to environmental planning and management more generally, both within and beyond Europe's borders. It is pertinent to academics concerned with the operation of the two Directives, and also broader issues relating to the problems and synergies related to implementing overlapping pieces of environmental legislation. The potential significance of this study to practitioners responsible for meeting the requirements of the WFD and SEA Directive is also clear.

The discussion begins by introducing the WFD and the SEA Directive. The procedural linkages between the requirements of the Directives are then outlined, concentrating on the preparation and assessment of RBMPs. Requirements common to the WFD and the SEA Directive are highlighted, including the collection of baseline data, monitoring and consultation and public participation. Undertaking SEA during the preparation of other

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