

The Principle of Full Cost Recovery in the EU-Water Framework Directive—Genesis and Content

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Extract

1. Introduction

The integration of economic aspects in river basin management has been a feature of the European Water Framework Directive¹ from its initial drafts. Its most important reference is in Article 9 that introduces the principle of cost recovery² for water services³ in accordance with the polluter pays principle. Cost recovery is achieved through the prices that the water service consumers have to pay to the provider directly and through any tax, charge or levy that is imposed on the service, and is borne by the consumer directly or indirectly. Full cost recovery pricing of water services according to the ‘polluter pays principle’ fulfils three basic economic functions: informational, steering and financing. Ideally, the price of a good reflects all financial and supplementary costs incurred by the production of that good. A full cost recovery for water services in accordance with the polluter pays principle has the potential to inform the consumers of the water services about the complete costs of their consumption, and the water users about the costs of their activities such as the discharge of wastewater that deteriorate the quality of waters.

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