



Evaluation of the Impact of the CAP on Water

Executive Summary

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Alliance Environnement
European Economic Interest Grouping

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European Economic Interest Grouping

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OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

Sustainable management of water in agriculture is emerging as a core issue in the context of climate change. The EU agricultural sector is dependent on the availability of the water resources, but it can also significantly affect the ecological, chemical and quantitative status of waterbodies.

This evaluation examined the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) measures and instruments on water quantity and quality. For this purpose, the role played by the overall CAP framework on the performance of farming practices and corresponding pressures on water was considered. The study provides an overview of the implementation choices of Member States and assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value of the CAP vis-à-vis the objective of sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions, in terms of water-related aspects.

The analysis covers the period following the implementation of the 2013 CAP reform, from 1 January 2014 onwards. All EU Member States were considered in the evaluation. However, analysis of the CAP implementation and effects has been carried out in-depth for the River Basin Districts selected for the case studies in ten Member States.

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the 'CAP instruments and measures addressing sustainable management of natural resources and climate action'. The starting point for the evaluation was the development of an intervention logic identifying the potential contribution of those instruments and measures to the CAP's overall objective of 'sustainable management of natural resources and climate action'.

The replies to the evaluation study questions were based on the analysis of various datasets and a literature review. To study policy implementation, statistical analysis was carried out on various EU datasets, i.e. the Common Monitoring & Evaluation Framework indicators (CMEF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Annual Implementation Reports (AIR data) and the Clearance Audit Trail System (CATS). Other EU thematic databases were used including Water Information System for Europe (WISE), agri-environmental indicators (AEI) of Eurostat, the Land Use and Coverage Area frame Survey (LUCAS), the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) and the Farm Structure Survey (FSS).

In addition, ten case studies were conducted in North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany), Aragon (Spain), Alsace (France), Croatia, Apulia (Italy), the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Romania and Finland to collect information on the implementation and observed effects of the CAP in specific River Basin Districts and its linkage with the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) implemented under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Relevant stakeholders concerned with water and agriculture issues were interviewed, and a survey was conducted among farmer advisers and farmer representatives.

MEMBER STATE IMPLEMENTATION CHOICES ON CAP MEASURES ADDRESSING WATER ISSUES

Under the horizontal Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, cross-compliance instruments strengthen the controls of requirements established outside the CAP, such as the Nitrates Directive (Standards for good agricultural and environmental conditions of land (SMR)). In addition, they provide for minimum mandatory standards of good agricultural and environmental condition of land (GAEC), which Member States specify with concrete requirements. Three GAECs directly target water (buffer strips, authorisation for water abstraction in case of irrigation, prohibition of discharging listed dangerous substances). All basic rules have been established, for instance buffer strips along water courses or obtention of a license by farmers for abstraction of water for irrigation. However, some additional requirements can vary according to Member States' choices (e.g. no prohibition in the application of pesticides under GAEC 1, requirement of appropriate means to measure the volumes of water abstracted under GAEC 2). Other GAECs and SMRs have indirect positive effects on waterbodies, by improving soil water-retention capacity, limiting erosion or maintaining specific land covers beneficial for water. However, the study reveals that case-study Member States usually settled for minimum standards.

The greening measures of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 do not directly address water issues and rely on three EU-wide practices aiming to protect soil quality (crop diversification), farm biodiversity (ecological focus area (EFA)) and carbon sequestration (permanent grassland). While these measures could have a positive indirect impact on water quality, the implementation choices of case-study Member States were not ambitious enough for greening measures to result in significant changes in farming

practices (e.g. broad choice of eligible EFAs, some EFAs being already required under other schemes, crop diversification equivalence granted to maize growers in France under mono-cropping systems). The greening measures, as implemented by Member States, are therefore guaranteeing the maintenance of minimum beneficial practices by farmers.

Under Rural Development Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Member States allocated nearly €80 billion – i.e. more than 50% of the overall budget – to Priority 4 for restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, Focus Area (FA) 5A for increased efficiency in water use, FA 5D for reducing greenhouse gases emissions from agriculture, and FA 5E for carbon sequestration. The Member States did not distinguish the budget targeting operations under FA 4B for enhancing sustainable water management and FA 4C for limiting soil erosion.¹ However, it was assumed that budget allocated to Priority 4 and Focus Areas 5A, 5D and 5E related to some extent to operations expected to have positive effects on water.² The main measures programmed in the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) under Priority 4 and Focus Areas 5A, 5E and 5D are, by order of importance: Rural development measure (M) 10 Agri-environment-climate measures (AECM) (33.4% of the dedicated budget), M13 Compensatory allowance scheme for areas with natural constraints (31.8%), M11 Organic farming (12.5%), M8 Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests (9%) and M4 Investments in physical assets (7.22%). However, the effects of M13 on water are indirect and depend on the types of farming supported.

Despite the significant budget allocated to Priority 4 and Focus Areas 5A, 5D and 5E, the analysis of the RDPs measures for sustainable management of natural resources and climate action as implemented by the Member States revealed that only a few measures were actually supporting operations directly targeting water quality and quantity issues (e.g. M10 AECM, M11 Organic farming, M4 Investments, M12 Natura 2000 and WFD).

Other CAP instruments and measures can have indirect impact on water quality and quantity, depending on the distribution of the support granted and the types of farming supported. Implementation of the Basic Payment Scheme, together with Voluntary Coupled Support and Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC), can contribute to support small diversified holdings mostly in grass-fed animal sectors located in ANC areas. Except for Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, voluntary coupled support was granted to the livestock and protein sectors in all the case-study Member States, with potential benefit for the water status depending on the type of livestock farming supported (extensive grazing systems).

DRIVERS AND REASONS BEHIND THE IMPLEMENTATION CHOICES

The drivers behind the implementation choices of the CAP framework vary between Member States. Many of them considered administrative, economic and historical factors first. Cross-compliance and the greening measures were implemented to apply the mandatory environmental practices required by EU legislation, with different levels of ambition concerning the environmental objectives.

Interviews with the Managing Authorities highlighted that the environmental issues were mainly considered and addressed in the RDPs, i.e. based on voluntary measures for farmers. As stated by the stakeholders, the need to alleviate agricultural pressures affecting water quantity and/or quality was considered in all RDPs of case-study Member States. The involvement of water authorities during the design process of the RDP, notably through the co-funding of RDP measures, played a significant role in the implementation of measures supporting beneficial practices for the promotion of sustainable management of water. Another driver likely to contribute to the consideration of water issues in the RDPs is the concomitant working out of the RBMPs. Indeed, similar stakeholders can be involved in the design process of both documents, as seen by the successful case in Finland. Economic issues and budgetary allocation (and sometimes other environmental issues) were mentioned by the interviewees as other drivers behind the choices made by the Managing Authorities.

On the farmer side, the implementation of the water-relevant CAP measures (M10 AECM, M11 Organic farming, M4 Investments) is motivated by economic reasons. As mentioned by the farm advisers

¹ Under Priority 4, Focus Area (FA) 4A aims at enhancing biodiversity. Operations financed under this Focus Area are not always related to water, and it was not possible to distinguish the budget allocated to FA 4A from those of FA 4B enhancing sustainable water management and 4C limiting soil erosion.

² Investments in expansion of irrigation would normally be programmed under FA 2A for restoring and enhancing the competitiveness of farms.

surveyed, the need to comply with new standards and, the environmental and climate motivations were secondary reasons pushing farmers to implement M4 Investments, M11 Organic farming and M10 AECM. As shown by the FADN analysis, geographical and economic factors also influence the choices of beneficiaries. M4 Investments was usually used more by farmers with high income and a large utilised agriculture area (UAA) in case-study Member States, whereas the M10 AECM beneficiaries are mainly mixed farmers growing more than four crops and having large UAAs. It was pointed out during the interviews that water-related measures are less attractive for intensive farming systems, generally located in regions facing water problems (Germany, France and Austria).

EFFECTIVENESS

The CAP framework was assessed as effective for maintaining minimum practices beneficial for water quality; however, its effects on the quantitative aspects of water are rather contrasted.

The CAP instruments and measures of interest to prevent further deterioration of waterbodies' chemical status are the cross-compliance and, to a lesser extent, the greening measures. They guarantee minimum good agricultural practices, which help reduce fertilisers/pesticides and their transfer into waters, as well as prevent further deterioration of soil and bank erosion (e.g. buffer strips, retention of landscape features, crop diversification, etc.). RDP measures such as M10 AECM, M11 Organic farming, and to a lesser extent M4 Investments, encourage the implementation of agricultural practices that help improve the chemical status of waterbodies. However, RDP measures are voluntary, and their uptake varied between Member States over the assessment period.

Regarding water abstraction, the percentage of farmers benefiting from M4 support under FA 5A for increased efficiency in water use was close to zero in the Member States studied. Furthermore, water-demanding sectors such as maize, vegetables, fruits and flowers significantly rely on CAP Pillar I, which represent a significant share of their income. According to the CMEF indicators, the percentage of irrigated land switching to more efficient irrigation systems was very limited at the EU level. Moreover, when combined with investment in existing irrigation systems, M4 Investments can support the expansion of the irrigation systems in areas where the quantitative status of waterbodies is less than good, provided that minimum savings in the water used for irrigation are achieved at farm level. However, in the case-study Member States, no clear verification of the water savings achieved is carried out after the completion of the investment.

The absence of data makes it impossible to draw final conclusions on the effect of water-related instruments and measures on the water-holding capacity of soil. In general, Member States where water-holding capacity is low are not always those where CAP instruments and measures were implemented most effectively. On the other hand, Germany have seized the opportunities given by GAECs and greening measures (e.g. permanent grassland, GAEC 1 on buffer strips, GAEC 4 on minimum soil cover, GAEC 5 on soil erosion) to deal with the low soil retention capacity in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia.

The effects of other CAP instruments and measures on water are also difficult to assess. The income support provided by the direct payments is significant, and the FADN analysis showed that Pillar I support is essential for the profitability of many farm types in the case-study Member States. VCS and M13 were also assessed as potentially relevant to maintain some specific types of farming beneficial for water. However, their effects vary according to the implementation choices of Member States.

It was difficult to assess the overall impact of the combined CAP framework on the improvement of waterbodies status, mainly due to 1) limitations of available data, i.e. WISE data do not enable assessment whether there was a change between the 1st RBMP (2010) and the 2nd RBMP (2016), and 2) varying effects of the CAP instruments and measures pursuant to Member States' implementation choices (budget allocation, eligibility criteria, selection criteria), the level of uptake and the types of operations supported. However, according to Member States' reporting, carried out under the RBMP, agriculture remains among the main pressures preventing the achievement of good water status for waterbodies.

Finally, soil and climatic conditions also highly influence the effectiveness of the instruments and measures, whereas economic factors play a significant role in inducing farmers to implement specific agricultural practices or produce specific crops.

TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

In the EU, as well as in the rest of the world, innovations are identified as a major lever for enhancing sustainable water management. The literature review showed the diversity of technological and social innovations implemented across the EU that may affect water management in the agricultural sector. In particular, precision farming and optimised soil management practices (in relation to conservation agriculture) have developed in recent years, especially in central and western EU, and allow farmers to use resources in a more efficient way (i.e. fertilisers, plant protection products, water).

According to the survey carried out in the case-study Member States, the adoption rate of social innovations is on average lower than that of technological innovations. The adoption rate of innovations varies across the EU, e.g. the use of optimised soil management equipment is more developed in western and central EU and high-efficiency irrigation systems are more common in Mediterranean Member States. Some innovations which could respond to specific challenges linked to water management are still little developed, e.g. reuse of treated wastewater which can be suitable in arid environments.

The effects of innovations on water vary depending on the farming system, the biogeographical region and the socioeconomic context where they are implemented, and on how they are implemented. Farmers' knowledge, training and awareness are of paramount importance in order to avoid the misuse of innovations and its rebound effects on water quality and/or quantity. Effective advisory activities and demonstration projects can help to avoid these negative effects.

Overall, with the data available for this evaluation, it was not straight forward to measure the effects of innovations. However, it is assumed that technological and social innovations have helped lead to an improvement in water management in the EU (e.g. with the improvement of the efficiency of irrigation equipment in the southern EU). Further benefits could arise from enhanced development and dissemination of innovations and the promotion of good practices related to their use (e.g. to avoid rebound effects).

EFFICIENCY

Greening measures and cross-compliance effectively contributed to maintain specific practices beneficial for water protection. The administrative costs associated with the verifications of cross-compliance and greening measures are considerable but deemed as necessary in view of the benefits obtained.

Under Pillar II, the targeting of RDP measures towards relevant beneficiaries/geographical areas regarding water issues is key for ensuring maximum efficiency in achieving the CAP objectives related to water. RDP measures M10 AECM and M11 Organic farming are the most effective RDP measures in reducing agricultural pressures on water. Nonetheless, in some Member States, the calculation of the payment rate of M10 AECM fails to ensure sufficient uptake, in particular by highly productive farms. For M11 Organic farming, payment rates can be considered as efficient, insofar as organic farming prevents water pollution from fertilisers and pesticides and its associated depollution costs. M15.1 Forest-environment and climate services and M8.1 Afforestation were both significant measures fostering land covers beneficial for water protection. However, they generate heavy administrative burden that is mostly necessary but could be reduced (notably through collective application).

In view of the budget spent and the results achieved, M4 Investments targeting water-relevant operations does not seem very efficient for protecting water from pollution. Few data are actually available to assess the effectiveness of the measure towards water-related CAP objectives. Furthermore, the aid intensity of the measure was sometimes found to be not attractive (in the Netherlands, Poland and Alsace (France)). Additionally, the interviewees reported that M4 Investments generated heavy administrative burden associated with the EU provisions and their implementation by Member States. On water quantity, the administrative burden generated by specific conditions for investments related to irrigation (Article 46 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013) has not led to sufficient results in actual water savings.

Overall, payment rates for M1 Knowledge transfer and M2 Advisory services were found to be set at an efficient level. However, the EU provisions, which generate significant administrative burden, often discouraged their implementation and uptake. M16 Cooperation was also mentioned as burdensome for the beneficiaries. The 'Omnibus' regulation (EU) 2017/2393 provided simplification, but the stakeholders interviewed reported that it came too late to enable significant implementation of the measures during the programming period.

RELEVANCE

At the EU level, the CAP offers the possibility of addressing relevant needs identified in terms of agriculture and water quality and quantity. However, in practice, the actual objectives targeted by the instruments and measures depend on the implementation choices of the Member States/Managing Authorities. Some specific pressures arising from agricultural practices are still not addressed by the CAP. Hence, specific measures to target the use of pharmaceutical products or cleaning products in the livestock sector, for example to wash out equipment in milking parlours, should be integrated into the overall CAP framework. Another aspect which is not addressed sufficiently is the need to help irrigated farms to adapt to water scarcity stress episodes, by supporting their diversification with rainfed crops in area prone to droughts. Then, the greening measure on crop diversification could better address fertilisers and pesticides use for example by requiring crop rotation.

At the Member States/Managing Authorities level, the identification of needs in the case-study RDPs is consistent with the orientations of the RBMPs, even though some needs may be underestimated in RDPs (e.g. the need to improve the state of aquatic ecosystems and associated wetlands). The analysis of the CAP implementation in case-study Member States has shown that water-related needs have generally been taken into consideration by the Member States/Managing Authorities. In many cases (e.g. the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovenia), the Rural Development measures were explicitly designed and implemented in order to address issues identified in their RBMPs, thereby favouring the relevance to water-related priorities. RDP measures can also be targeted at areas facing specific issues in water resources, thereby ensuring their relevance to local needs (e.g. the AECM measure in Finland, the greening permanent grassland measure in Scotland (United Kingdom), etc.). Furthermore, water-related needs not covered by the CAP are sometimes addressed through national policies (e.g. actions to raise farmers' awareness about water issues in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany).

At farm level, CAP measures can address farmers' needs provided that they are adapted to their local context. When farmers need to significantly change their practices (e.g. to adapt to new water-related provisions, to climate change or to changes in societal demand), support in the form of advisory actions, training, investment support and other financial support is often crucial.

COHERENCE

Coherence within the CAP

The CAP instruments and measures were assessed to be partially coherent with the objective of sustainable management of natural resources and climate action. Some synergies between CAP instruments and measures were identified, such as the provision of tailored advices (Farm Advisory System, M1, M2) to better implement other water-related measures (M4, M10, M11 and M12). However, some conflicts were also identified, for instance in relation to irrigation support, as it is difficult to guarantee that supported investment will not lead to increase pressure on water resources, especially in cases where irrigated area increases. Then, sector-specific support granted under the regulation for common organisation of the markets can be used to support investment in irrigation under less stringent rules than M4 Investments. Furthermore, sectors with the highest impact on water quality and quantity (e.g. fruits, flowers, wine) are not always eligible for direct payments and thus not subject to corresponding greening and GAEC requirements. Moreover, greening practices do not apply on permanent crops. Additionally, support for water-related practices with negative effect on climate is inconsistent with climate objectives (e.g. support to irrigated sectors in areas where water resources are already overexploited). In the Netherlands, some inconsistencies may hinder farmers from becoming involved in potentially beneficial measures for the environment including water issues (e.g. M10 fostering banks restoration that leads to reduction in eligible land). Member States' implementation choices are determinant for the consistency of the instruments and measures with the objective of sustainable management of natural resources and climate action. However, some limitations arose from Member States' implementation choices (e.g. authorisation to use pesticides on buffer strips under GAEC 1) and farmers' choice of practices (e.g. use of pesticides on nitrogen fixing crops and catch/cover crops outside EFA).

CAP consistency with EU policy on water

The CAP framework is partially coherent with the water-related objective of environmental/climate legislation and strategies (i.e. the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrates Directive, Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive and the Biodiversity Strategy). The CAP instruments and measures which contribute

to the objectives of the concerned directives are mostly cross-compliance, the greening measures, M10 AECM, M11 Organic farming and M4 Investments. Furthermore, the CAP has been identified as the most important EU fund for implementing the objectives of the WFD¹.

However, inconsistencies arise in cases where support is granted to increase irrigated areas where waterbodies with less than good quantitative status are affected. Also, the delivery of direct payments to specific sectors with mixed effects on water depending on their agricultural practices prevents full coherence of the CAP with EU water policy, as well as the fact that specific sectors with potential impact on water quality and quantity are not constrained by the water-relevant CAP instruments and measures in all Member States (i.e. cross-compliance GAEC and the greening measures).

EU-ADDED VALUE

The assessment showed that the EU framework brought a certain added value by raising awareness on water issues and putting the topic of water higher on the agenda, stimulating the implementation of a higher level of requirements and budget for water and environmental issues, creating a level playing field for all Member States, ensuring equity between Member States and promoting exchanges between Member States on water (e.g. through the European Network for Rural Development). However, following opinions of certain stakeholders, this added value was accompanied by a potentially higher administrative burden of the CAP (including water-related measures) than expected if managed nationally or regionally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation highlighted the fact that the Member States' implementation choices determine the extent to which the CAP measures and instruments meet the EU objective of sustainable management of water. However, the budget allocation to Priority 4 (as a whole) did not allow for precise assessment of their strategy to address water quality issues. It is thus recommended that Member States accurately monitor the resources allocated to Focus Area 4B "improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management", as well as the output and outcomes achieved under this FA, as in the case of FA 5A "increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture".

The evaluation also demonstrated that a considerable amount of the CAP budget is granted to holdings independently of their agricultural pressures on water. Hence, direct payments should be reconsidered in order to better support less profitable farms implementing farming practices beneficial for the environment and water resources. Additional eligibility criteria should also be considered under Voluntary Coupled Support to ensure that sufficient pasture area is available by livestock unit, to avoid any increase in nutrient pressure on water under livestock VCS.

Cross-compliance and greening measures are systematically implemented by almost all farmers benefiting from the CAP support at the EU level. They are considered as effective in maintaining minimum practices beneficial for water (e.g. buffer strips, winter soil cover, landscape features, crop diversification, etc.). To further improve waterbodies status, more stringent requirements should be set under these schemes (e.g. ban of both fertilisers and pesticides on buffer strips), and exemptions should be avoided. It would also be beneficial to extend the regulatory basis set by GAECs to farmers not benefiting from the CAP support (flower, fruit and vegetable producers in some Member States) or to seek for other measures to limit their pressures on water.

In the context of the necessary adaptation of agriculture to climate change, greater attention should be paid to quantitative water issues, and notably to water savings. Support for irrigation systems should mainly concern the improvement of existing installations with effective water savings, verified ex-post. The creation of new irrigation systems should not be supported in areas where waterbodies are facing quantitative issues, unless the overall project involves a less water-dependent farming system with the implementation of alternatives (e.g. agroforestry, drought-resistant crops, shade nets, etc.). Water-collection and corresponding equipment should also be supported more under the RDP measure M4 Investments, particularly in areas subject to water quantity issues.

As the Member States favour the voluntary approach in inducing farmers to change their practices, it is recommended to increase the attractiveness of the RDP measures. In particular, payment rates under

¹ Notably, RDPs have been the main source of funding for Programme of Measures in the 2nd cycle RBMPs.

M10 AECM should be re-assessed in order to be a substantial incentive for farmers. Member States should consider the optimal uptake to be reached to achieve environmental objectives when setting the payment rates based on the principle of costs incurred/income foregone.

Lastly, targeting of the RDP measures towards priority areas is determinant to achieve positive results on water. Therefore, Member States should establish eligibility and selection criteria to target priority areas facing water issues when implementing measures (e.g. M10, M11, M15) with potential positive effects on water.

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