

AWARE Citizen Declaration - Executive Summary

We are a group of 30 citizens coming from five European countries who volunteered and were selected randomly to participate to the AWARE European project - a project that connects people for better European coastal water management (www.aware-eu.net). During the project we discussed three very different case studies (the Sacca di Goro lagoon in Italy, the Gulf of Riga in Estonia and Latvia, and the Southern North Sea and the Seine, Somme and Scheldt river basins in France and Belgium). Over more than a year of meetings and discussions, we were asked to provide our points of view and assessment on what research tells us, what policy is doing, and how scientific knowledge, policy making and citizens' experience and values could be better connected to provide for sustainable water management choices, now and for the next generations.

How can we achieve a better and more sustainable coastal water management in Europe? Here is a summary of our main conclusions:

ANOTHER APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND COMPLEXITY

Throughout AWARE we focused on the challenge of eutrophication, but it is clear to us that issues of water quality cannot be restricted to that one challenge alone. We observe that **eutrophication is in fact only one point of entry into broader ecosystem health issues**, which include pollutants coming from both the land and the sea. We underline that only a **holistic, or multidimensional, approach** can help all involved actors (citizens, stakeholders, experts from different disciplines, decision makers) understand the complex issues surrounding water quality. Only such an approach can receive acceptance from relevant actors, and lead to sustainable and long-term solutions.

AN UPDATE OF THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD)

We realised that there has been little room given to citizens so far in the implementation of the WFD. We believe we are legitimate actors that should be part of the decision making process defining what "good" environmental status is, and given the chance to share our opinions with scientists and key policy-makers. **We - the citizens - are too often out of the system.** We have heard evidence that the European Water Framework Directive's goals may not be reached in many areas of Europe. We are concerned about the quality of our coastal waters and by the lack of consistency we observe in water quality data, in the monitoring of water quality, and in the enforcement power of the European Union. We call for an updated Water Framework Directive, which will allow for better continuous and participatory improvement and strict control of the implementation of the Directive, as well as for **more consistency in the measurement of data, and between different EU policies**. For example, could DG Environment of the European Commission, as working on a transversal topic, be playing a bigger role in making bridges between the WFD and the Common Agricultural Policy, or between the WFD and the Marine Strategy?

TIMELY, LOCAL, AND RELEVANT SOLUTIONS ON THE GROUND

We know that we are currently still seeing the effects on coastal waters of several decades of human practice and we know that the ecosystem has a strong capacity of inertia: change will come slowly. This is why the time for talking and for standing still has passed, and **the time for actions has come**. We are aware that no single solution

will be the best per se. We strongly recommend that all options be evaluated against **environmental and socioeconomic criteria** – especially those relevant at the local level.

It is clear to us that challenges are different for every region and we therefore encourage **solutions that make sense and are most effective at the local level**. One region may benefit from increasing the number of waste water treatment plants, but supporting a transition to organic farming may be the best for another area.

BETTER CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN RESEARCH, POLICY-MAKING AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Throughout the AWARE process, we observed and experienced important gaps between all concerned actors. According to us, these gaps jeopardize the achievement of sustainable water management in Europe. It has become clear that expert information both from researchers and from practitioners are necessary to take better, sustainable decisions on water quality. Scientific experience and consultations are crucial. But so is the information from citizens, farmers, fishermen, and other involved actors. **Scientific ambassadors** in fact, would be a great way to “translate” critical information for citizens, business representatives, and politicians alike – as it happened with the information we benefited from in the AWARE process. We also push for better connectivity between all concerned actors at the **water basin scale**, across borders, **including non EU member states when necessary**.

BETTER INFORMATION TO KEY ACTORS

Citizens are not the only ones who should benefit from better and clearer information on water quality issues. Other stakeholders also need to receive full information in order to help them make better choices. **Dialogue with farmers, fishers, tourist organisations** and other stakeholders should be strengthened and reinforced. We as citizens can approach farmer lobbies for instance, but scientists also need to enter into a **dialogue with the citizens** about coastal water health and upstream challenges. A special focus should also be placed on **children’s education** because they also need to act now, and in the future. Because **policy makers are the ones who can truly make** change happen, we encourage them to listen to citizens and scientists to have the most enlightened and appropriate decisions.

What are we ready to do as citizens?

We are ready to be part of a change. We recognise our share of responsibility for the impact on the environment and therefore we are willing to act – as consumers, as part of the decision making process, alone or collectively.

Although politicians, business and scientists more often communicate with each other through existing channels (like in the Science-policy interface) we found that **citizens are often left out, or information about water quality issues does not reach us**. Keeping us, citizens, in the dark prevents us from making full use of our ability to contribute to the decision-making process. We remind that with the right type of expert information we were able to say precisely what we are ready and not ready to do, and explain why we hold those opinions. **Including our opinions would result in more sustainable water management decisions.**

We as citizens are willing to take the first steps and hope other parties will follow. Join us in this change!
