European Parliament Environment Committee weakening the revision of the list of priority substances: no environmental quality standards for pharmaceuticals - rapporteur R. Seeber's 'compromise amendment' voted by majority.

Vitiolic comments by environmental and health groups

“MEPs reject restricting pharmaceuticals in water
Green groups say decision was based on politics, not science.
By Dave Keating - 28.11.2012 / 19:36 CET

Members of the European Parliament's environment committee voted today (28 November) to reject a European Commission proposal to restrict the presence of certain pharmaceuticals in EU freshwater.

The Commission proposed adding 15 chemicals to the current list of 33 'water priority substances' in the Water Framework Directive. This would mean they must be monitored. In addition, it proposed to establish 'environmental quality standards' for the substances, which would restrict their presence in the water.

Three of these nominated chemicals were pharmaceutical substances - the first such nomination. Pharmaceuticals can enter the water through human waste.

But today the Parliament's environment committee decided by a large majority not to give the three pharmaceuticals environmental quality standards, as it did for the other 12 substances. Instead, the three were only added to the priority substances list. So they will be monitored, but not restricted. Quality standards may be set for the pharmaceuticals in four years, depending on the results of the monitoring.

Centre-right Austrian MEP Richard Seeber, who is guiding the legislation through the Parliament, was concerned at the effect the move could have on the availability of the pharmaceuticals – two of which are used in birth control. The environment committee today agreed with him, rejecting the inclusion on the list of the two substances used in contraceptive pills, EE2 and E2, and the anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac.

The risks identified in the pharmaceutical substances do not outweigh the “importance of human health considerations”, Seeber said in his report on the matter. “Water policy should not determine directly the health policy of member states.”

But environmental campaigners disagreed. “By delaying action on these three pharmaceuticals for another decade, the environment committee has set a dangerous precedent by ignoring the robust scientific evidence,” said Sergey Moroz of campaign group WWF. “Unfortunately, the problem is not going to go away and
will only get worse and more difficult to solve." He said the decision by MEPs was political, following pressure from pharmaceutical companies, rather than scientific.

Member states have been divided on the issue of including pharmaceuticals on the list, and were unable to come to an agreement on the dossier during the Danish presidency of the Council of Ministers. Talks will resume under the Irish presidency. A plenary vote in the Parliament has been scheduled for April, to give member states time to agree a common position.”

Read the amendments adopted, eliminating the proposed environmental quality standards for three pharmaceuticals from the revision of the list of priority substances, and replacing them by a " - ":

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-500.615%2b01%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN and go to “amendment 10” at the end of the text.

The vote by MEPs triggered vitriolic reactions from environment and health NGOs:

Health Care Without Harm Europe’s Executive Director Anja Leetz said: “This is a missed opportunity for the European Parliament to send out a clear message that significant negative impacts on freshwater and marine ecosystems and ultimately humans is caused by pharmaceutical substances with endocrine disrupting properties and other emerging pollutants”.


For WWF, Senior Water Policy Officer Sergey Moroz stressed: “Today’s vote in the Parliament is bad news for aquatic life. The evidence of fish feminisation caused by the endocrine-disrupting chemicals is among the most extensive and alarming we have on the impact of chemicals on the aquatic environment. By delaying action on these three pharmaceuticals for another decade) The Environment Committee has set a dangerous precedent by ignoring the robust scientific evidence Unfortunately, the problem is not going to go away and will only get worse and more difficult to solve.”

http://www.wwf.eu/?206870/EU-Parliament-vote-allows-water-pollution-from-pharmaceuticals-to-continue

It is also interesting to observe the decision against appeals both by the Plenary of the European Parliament “European Parliament resolution of 3 July 2012 on the implementation of EU water legislation, ahead of a necessary overall approach to European water challenges” (note: rapporteur R. Seeber http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2012-0273&language=EN&ring=A7-2012-0192), and Mr Seeber’s appeal of May 2012 for stronger pollution control measures “Raising the standards. We must promote legislation that fights pollution in our waters” (The Parliament Magazine, issue 348, pp 61f http://www.theparliament.com/digimag/issue348).

The vote in the Plenary of the European Parliament is foreseen for April 2013.