

Water prices and households' available income: indicators for the assessment of potential disproportionate costs - Illustration from the Artois-Picardie Basin (France)

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ABSTRACT: The EU Water Framework Directive is implemented in the French basin Artois-Picardie by several working groups involving water stakeholders. One of these groups deals with "Economic" and "pressures & impacts" assessment. The main objective of this group is to carry out the characterisation and the baseline scenario combining economic and Pressures and Impacts information i.e. to identify the pressures caused by main uses and to provide socio-economic indicators on these uses.

The investigations have undertaken a specific analysis of the weight of the water services bill for households in the Artois-Picardie basin. In this basin of 5 000 000 inhabitants, the mean price for a cubic meter of water is 3,28 euros in 2004 (inc. water distribution, collection and treatment of waste waters and environmental taxes), but this price can reach 5 euros and more in some specific areas of the basin. Unfortunately in some areas of the basin, these high prices are combined with low mean available income per inhabitant (the rate for the Artois-Picardie basin is 20% below the national ratio).

This paper give a short presentation of the method used for collecting both water prices and indicators on mean available income at the municipality level (2 500 municipalities for the whole Artois-Picardie River basin).

Then it presents the main results of this study, for example, that the ratio comparing the weight of the water invoice and the available income can exceed 2%¹ in many municipalities.

The last part of the paper draws some conclusions on how, in the context of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, these results can be used for developing a water pricing policy that will be both incentive and sustainable for households.

¹ 2% is generally considered as a guidance value in many documents (e.g. EU commission, OECD, Académie de l'eau).