



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Drought conditions in Cyprus (2013 - 2014)
- *Information from the Cyprus delegation*

Delegations will find, in the Annex, a note from the Cyprus delegation to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 24 March 2014.

Once again, Cyprus is undergoing a period of very low winter rainfall, even lower than in the disastrous years of 2005-2008. Last December rainfall was only 55% of normal levels, affecting seriously the sprouting of cereals and other crops typically sown in late autumn. January and February yielded only 36% and 34% of normal rainfall which is a disastrous level for the growth of crops and pasture and in terms of collecting sufficient water in dams and other storage facilities to cover the needs of the country during the long dry summer.

In fact, precipitation between October 2013 (the beginning of the hydrological year) and mid-March 2014 was only 46% of normal and the total inflow of surface water to Cyprus' extensive network of dams was only 8.6 million cubic meters whereas in an average year the inflow amounts to 85 million. This was by far the lowest harvest since the construction of the country's large storage dams some 30 years ago. The total quantity of water currently held in storage is only 50% of the total capacity of the dams compared to 88% at the same time last year.

Crops and livestock have been seriously affected and will suffer most in the months to come, especially irrigated agriculture which accounts for a high share of agricultural income. The Southern Conveyor System of dams and treatment plants, which covers the water needs of 75% of the island's population (including the cities of Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Ayia Napa and Paralimni as well as many village communities) and feeds the country's major irrigation schemes, is now holding only 69 million cubic meters of water or 38% of its capacity. According to the Drought Management Plan incorporated into Cyprus' 1st River Basin Management Plan, the consequence of this situation is that farmers can at best hope to receive 50% of their needs for irrigating permanent crops and 30% for seasonal crops. Irrigated crops relying on underground water sources such as potatoes, the island's main export product, face a similar challenge. It goes without saying that rainfed crops such as cereals will be affected even more.

Seen in the context of the current financial crisis and economic recession, the challenge faced by Cypriot farmers is a formidable one and threatens their very survival. The Government of Cyprus would like to inform the Commission and the delegations of the member states of this grave situation and seeks their solidarity in finding ways and means to support these farmers to overcome the difficult time and to avoid giving up farming. Under the conditions of Cyprus, this would have even more disastrous consequences for the environment, as it leads to land abandonment, soil erosion and desertification.

In this connection it is worth mentioning the additional constraints faced by Cyprus because of the low financial envelope allocated to it under Rural Development, the lack of national funds to provide state aid and the non-application of the EU's solidarity fund when it comes to dealing with the consequences of drought on agricultural income.

We would like to ask the Commission to examine this information and propose specific and tangible measures, including possible utilization of the crisis management fund, to help avoid these disastrous consequences and support a group of farmers in real need of solidarity and assistance.