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#### NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Decreasing availability of water for agriculture in Cyprus - Information from the Cyprus delegation

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Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Cyprus delegation on the above-mentioned subject to be presented under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 18 June 2018.

## **Decreasing availability of water for agriculture in Cyprus**

Cyprus is experiencing drought conditions of increasing severity during the last decade, which affects water availability in all sectors of the economy (households, agriculture, tourism, industry) and has serious repercussions on the environment. Unfavourable weather conditions have led Cyprus to suffer from water shortages that have been particularly detrimental to agriculture and the environment. For 2018 the water availability situation is worsened because of the cumulative effects of drought experienced during the last three years. This is expected to have an even greater impact on crops (seasonal and permanent), livestock and the environment, adding to the cost of production and threatening agricultural activity.

The rainfall for the year 2016-17 has been the fourth worst of the decade with 2015-16 and 2013-14 being second and third and 2007-08 being the worst. For the period 31/10/2017-11/6/2018 rainfall was 419mm, or 85% of the normal level. The total inflow to dams was 44.1 million m<sup>3</sup>, which is the lowest for the last three years. As a result of the combined effect of three consecutive years of drought and low inflow of water in dams, total water reserves are only 64.2 million m<sup>3</sup>, representing only 22.1% of total dam capacity, which is the worst level for the last ten years, compared to 80.6 million m<sup>3</sup> (27.7% of total dam capacity) for the respective period last year. By the end of 2018, the expected total water reserves in the Southern Conveyor System, 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), will reach the second lowest recorded level of 9.4 million m<sup>3</sup>.

The continuous low precipitation of the last three years and the low inflow of water in dams has reduced dramatically the quantities of water which can be provided for irrigation. As a result, in May 2018 the government of the Republic of Cyprus adopted a policy of strict rationing of irrigation water, including:

- (i) Covering only 25% of the water needs of permanent crops.
- (ii) No water provision for new seasonal crops.
- (iii) Cutting off, by the end of June 2018, the water for existing seasonal crops

The application of the above emergency measures to combat water shortage is expected to have severe consequences on existing crops and will limit drastically the production of new seasonal crops. This situation is seriously damaging the income of our farmers and threatening the practice of agriculture in Cyprus.

The supply of only 25% of the water needs of permanent crops is sufficient only for the preservation of the trees, while any production will not only be of reduced quantity, but also of degraded quality. Furthermore, the shortage of water for irrigation will lead to such damage of permanent crops that it will take several years to return to quality production. The citrus fruit sector (the second largest export agricultural product of Cyprus after potatoes) is expected to be affected the most. The above mentioned restrictions for potatoes (the main agricultural product for export in Cyprus) will result in limited production of winter season crop and the possible loss of the relevant markets abroad. The summer season vegetable crops will be heavily affected, leading to limited production and a rise in imports in order to satisfy local consumption and tourism demand over the summer.

In addition, as the situation is expected to continue, drinking water will be heavily dependent on the existing desalinization units (production of 68 million m<sup>3</sup>/year) which are expected to cover 62% the total needs of 110 million m<sup>3</sup>/year for potable water, at considerable cost.

It should be noted that water demand management has always been an integral part of the policy on water in Cyprus and respective measures were taken in an effort to increase the efficiency of use of the scarce water resources. The main measures that have been implemented for agriculture are as follows:

- installation of improved farm irrigation systems, in every area of cultivated land
- promotion of irrigation scheduling
- metering of water services
- quota system for the allocation of government irrigation water in combination with penalty charges for over consumption

- water rationing during periods of drought
- abstraction controls
- promotion of less water demanding cultivations
- use of marginal quality water
- use of recycled water

The Government of Cyprus has embarked since the late 1960s on an ambitious program of reservoir construction on almost all major watercourses in an attempt to tap the surface waters and increase water availability, resulting in a total dam capacity of 331.9 million m<sup>3</sup>. However, low precipitation, especially during the last decade, has been detrimental to this effort and has necessitated the implementation of other solutions, namely water desalination.

Climate change has led not only to an exacerbation of water shortages, but also to the increasing occurrence of extreme weather phenomena, resulting in additional problems for agricultural production and needs for relief assistance. Extensive hail damage in sensitive areas of Cyprus experienced recently is an example.

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 farmers to overcome the difficulties and to avoid giving up farming. This would have even more disastrous consequences for the environment, as it leads to land abandonment, soil erosion and desertification. In this connection, Cyprus is preparing a request for assistance under the Solidarity Fund. In addition, acknowledging CAP goals and objectives (including the aim of sustainability in agriculture) we urge the Commission to propose, in the view of the new framework of CAP, solutions and means of supporting efforts to combat water shortages and drought conditions since this will become a critical factor due to climate change, for a number of member states, on achieving CAP objectives in the post 2020 era.