2024-2029 MANIFESTO
for the European Natural Mineral Water Sector
Foreword from the President

As I reflect on the challenges and the successes of the last five years, I am proud of the remarkable journey our sector has embarked upon.

Together, we recognised the need to lower our environmental footprint, signing up to concrete commitments under the EU Code of Conduct for Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices. Our sector drove the rollout of deposit and return systems across Europe, which are among the measures starting to deliver unprecedented rates of collection and recycling for our packaging. We have improved our water use ratio and taken steps to assess and reduce our carbon emissions. We have also continued our groundbreaking work in biodiversity protection, connecting with international conservation experts to make our monitoring and interventions even more effective.

In the midst of our progress on green topics, we met the challenge of COVID and the economic downturn, emerging strong to contribute to economic revitalisation across Europe. The European natural mineral water sector continues to embody centuries of heritage and identity, recognised across the globe for the extraordinary quality and purity of our products.

2024 is a pivotal year for Europe, as elections take place across the continent and the European Parliament enters a new term. The next five years hold immense promise, as we build on the foundations of the EU Green Deal with a renewed focus on competitiveness, growth and economic resilience.

Our sector has a proud track record of producing healthy and natural products sustainably, protecting water systems while providing jobs in remote, rural areas. We demonstrate that environmental protection, industrial strength and economic resilience can complement and even reinforce one another.

Our work is built on longstanding collaboration with value chain partners, public authorities and local stakeholders. As we collectively chart a course forward, let us be guided by the principles of collaboration, responsibility and foresight. It is only through these principles that we can achieve both prosperity and sustainability in Europe.

Alessandro Pasquale
President, Natural Mineral Waters Europe
Driving sustainable economic growth in a thriving EU market

There is increasing recognition that more needs to be done to bolster the EU industrial policy framework and champion innovation, competitiveness and growth. Deindustrialisation, economic headwinds and global geopolitical uncertainty are combining to create a challenging environment for all European sectors. In order to plan and invest, businesses require equal access to a fair and open market as well as consistency of action and long-term vision. It is vitally important that regulation in all areas is consistent with Single Market principles and avoids market fragmentation. This is essential for a thriving EU economy.

Of particular concern to our sector is the impact of new legislative requirements on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are often disproportionately affected. SMEs are the unsung heroes of the European economy, serving as engines for innovation and economic health. There are hundreds of SMEs in our sector, typically located in remote, rural areas, where they are important sources of employment and social cohesion. New policies should protect the continued health of this vital segment of the European economy.

In a modern, complex, globalised economy facing rapid technological change, effective policymaking must be based on strong evidence drawing on scientific research and sound data. When developing policy impacting industry, particularly SMEs, the European Commission must draw on industry’s expertise to understand the real-world impact of those new policies. Productive collaboration and scientific consultation are essential underpinnings for the ambitious policymaking Europe aims for.

A renewed European Parliament and European Commission have an opportunity to ensure an evidence-based approach which is supportive of business becomes the norm, while continuing to pursue ambitious policies.

A revitalised Europe needs an effective industrial policy which:

- supports growth, for SMEs as well as large businesses
- preserves and further develops the Single Market
- is based on sound scientific and economic data
- provides consistency and long-term legal certainty
1. Water
A foundation for healthier citizens

Adequate hydration, from all sources, helps to maintain good physical and cognitive performance. It also helps towards the prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as type 2 diabetes and kidney stones. And yet, studies show that Europeans are not adequately hydrated, particularly vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly and pregnant women.

Water is the healthiest and most natural way to hydrate, free from calories and additives. Improved hydration and drinking habits can make a significant contribution to healthier diets and may help counteract the obesity crisis which is currently challenging European health systems. Interventions to improve adequate and healthy hydration are both inexpensive and effective. Just a few glasses of water a day can make a significant difference to a person’s health.

Our recommendations for healthy hydration

In addition to securing citizens access to safe and high-quality water, actions should be taken at EU level to:

- Give water a prominent focus in policy instruments aimed at tackling the obesity crisis and preventing NCDs, recognising the role healthy hydration can play in achieving both of these aims
- Educate citizens on the importance of staying well-hydrated for maintaining good physical and mental performance and health
- Encourage water consumption and adequate hydration in EU health campaigns and dietary advice, from all sources
2. Healthy water cycles

Safeguarding water for future generations

Water is a key resource for nature, human subsistence, and a thriving economy alike. However, climate change and pollution are exerting pressure on the quantity and quality of available water. Most regions of Europe are at risk of being affected by water shortages or flooding in the years to come.

Therefore, sustainable groundwater management is crucial to guarantee the balance of natural water sources and protect them for future generations. This is a top priority for natural mineral water and spring water producers, who have a long history, in partnership with local stakeholders, of safeguarding catchment areas through which water flows to reach natural sources.

In the face of human activity and climate change, our sector is continuously gathering knowledge and expanding our understanding of the watersheds we depend on, abstracting water while respecting the local hydrogeological context.

Our recommendations for safeguarding water cycles

New water-related policies should:

- Pursue a multi-stakeholder, collaborative approach to groundwater protection and policy instruments aimed at increasing water resilience
- Take into account the essential function of high quality water as a source of hydration in the context of water management

3. Biodiversity

A measure of natural health

Preserving nature is essential for all of us to thrive, and biodiversity is a critical underpinning of this task. It must therefore be protected, and its decline reversed. Biodiversity and healthy water cycles are mutually reinforcing, so preserving the two go hand-in-hand.

Our members carry out pioneering work to protect and promote biodiversity where they operate. Healthy native habitats are essential to long-term soil health which supports ground filtration, and proactive measures to safeguard soil health and floral and faunal biodiversity are commonplace across our sector.

As part of our commitments under the EU Code of Conduct, we have been working together with third-party experts, including a leading international conservation organisation, to develop effective conservation strategies and monitoring frameworks. This will enable our sector to monitor our impact on biodiversity through specific indicators and ensure we take meaningful measures to preserve it, and our sources, for generations to come.
Our recommendations for promoting biodiversity

EU-level initiatives on biodiversity must:

- Catalyse multi-stakeholder collaboration
- Provide the practical tools businesses require to step up their actions, with particular emphasis on SMEs

4. Resource efficiency

Better for the environment and the economy

Using resources in a more efficient manner is among the prerequisites to solve the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. A thriving, resource-efficient market is not only better for the environment, it also keeps valuable resources in the European economy.

We have made great strides in improving the efficiency of our sector in all aspects of our operations, from lowering our water use ratio, to significantly reducing the use of virgin PET in packaging, to reporting on and reducing our sector’s carbon emissions. Through continuous improvement initiatives, we are continuing to enhance our efficiency wherever we can.

For meaningful change to take effect, SMEs must be on board for the journey, as they represent the vast majority of our membership and of the food sector as a whole.

Our recommendations for better resource efficiency

Upcoming EU initiatives in this field should:

- Promote circular over linear solutions, where environmentally beneficial
- Encourage investments and support Member States in building the required infrastructure to boost separate collection and high-quality recycling
- Base policy proposals on sound scientific evidence which support their intended impact
- Provide the necessary tools to SMEs to facilitate their transition to more resource-efficient models
5. Consumer information

Empowering better choices

Industry and consumers both have a role to play towards meeting the objectives of the Green Deal. Through their everyday choices and purchases, consumers can help Europe meet its decarbonization ambitions and support industry’s efforts to propose more sustainable products and services. They can also encourage the offer of healthier foods and beverages and help reduce food waste.

Our sector places great importance on clear and transparent communication to the consumer. Under EU legislation, all natural mineral water and spring water labels come with detailed information on the mineral composition, the location of the source and, where applicable, specific health benefits. Ours was one of the pioneering sectors in developing the EU Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR), to help guide our producers’ communication on the footprint of their products in a harmonised and credible way.

Our recommendations for consumer information

The EU should aim to:

- Foster an information environment which empowers consumers to make more sustainable choices
- Provide an enabling and rewarding framework for businesses to communicate about the steps they are taking to make their products more environmentally friendly

Together, we can continue to build a healthier and more sustainable future. Join us in our commitment to preserving the environment, supporting local communities, and promoting healthy hydration for all.
About NMWE

Natural Mineral Waters Europe has been the voice of natural mineral water and spring water since 1953, and today represents more than 500 producers. The sector provides European consumers with healthy, natural and high-quality hydration. Pioneers in sustainable management, our members have a long tradition of working in partnership with local communities to safeguard the environment around water resources. Our mission extends to achieving full circularity for all packaging.

Visit nmwe.org to learn more about our sector, including our members’ biodiversity projects around Europe and our map of progress towards implementing Deposit and Return Systems for packaging, Europe-wide.

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