

PRESS RELEASE

EU ROUNDTABLE ON SUSTAINABLE IRRIGATION

In partnership with the European Irrigation Association (EIA)

“Sustainable Irrigation is an ensemble of fair technologies and practices for the increasingly optimized use of water, energy, fertilizers, and other resources for irrigated agriculture, landscape, and ornamentals so that the natural resources are equitably used, for the welfare needs of the present and future generation”
(EIA, 2023)

Brussels, January 28th, 2025 – According to the UN, climate change is primarily a water crisis: it manifests its impacts on Earth’s most precious resources through worsening floods, rising sea levels, shrinking fields, wildfires and droughts, posing a significant threat, for both people and the environment. Therefore, as water scarcity seems to be an increasingly widespread challenge, ensuring an **efficient and sustainable water supply chain** needs to become a priority worldwide. As a cornerstone of the EU Green Deal, the **Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance** (Reg. EU 2020/852) provides a common classification system to identify economic activities that can contribute to different environmental objectives. However, despite its critical role in water management, the irrigation sector remains absent from this framework.

Since 1996, **EIA represents irrigation professionals** from the agricultural and landscape sectors, advocating for the best practices and know-how transfer of water resources management, acting as the sector’s leading voice at EU and national level. In 2023, together with **TEHA’s Knowledge Partnership**, the EIA began a journey aimed at enhancing the enabling sustainable potential of irrigation. In December 2023, this effort culminated in a formal request to the European Commission - through the EU Stakeholder Request Mechanism - to **include irrigation in the EU Taxonomy** (2020/852).

Addressing this gap, TEHA, in partnership with the EIA, organized an **EU Roundtable focused on the contribution of Sustainable Irrigation to the transition of the market it serves**, providing a platform for all stakeholders involved to exchange experiences around their role in promoting sustainability and water resilience within the context of Sustainable Finance linked with the EU Green Deal.

During the EU Roundtable, participants explored the findings of the EIA’s Position Paper **“Sustainable Irrigation – Focus on the Framework of the EU Taxonomy”**, outlining 14 economic activities and more than 150 technical screening criteria designed to assess the irrigation sector’s potential contribution to the EU’s environmental objectives. Beyond presenting these insights, the discussion brought together **selected experts and industry leaders to examine irrigation’s main challenges and opportunities**, fostering a dialogue on how the sector can play a pivotal role in Europe’s sustainable transition.

Following, some of the key considerations that emerged during the event.

- Water is a complex and often controversial issue, particularly within the framework of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), due to its critical role in sustainability, agriculture and food security. The **EU Water Resilience Strategy** will be based on **3 key objectives**: ensuring access to clean water, building a water-smart EU economy, and restoring and protecting water ecosystems. Such goals will be supported by **3 enablers**: integrated governance, sustainable financing through a blend of public and private investment, and innovation-driven research, and digitalization.
- **Farmers play a key role** and ensuring their active participation - whether in small- or large-scale enterprises - it is essential to provide not only financial support but also comprehensive training and knowledge sharing.

- When addressing water management related challenges, the focus should **shift from mere production to productivity**, placing greater emphasis on efficiency and resource optimization in sustainable irrigation practices.
- **Wastewater reuse in irrigation holds significant potential**, but its adoption is hindered by several challenges. Many farmers and end-users are unaware of its benefits, and the necessary infrastructure is either lacking or outdated. Building trust in the system is essential to unlock its full potential and ensuring wastewater reuse becomes a key contributor to sustainable water management.

During the debate, the **5 recommendations** outlined in the Position Paper for the advancement of the irrigation sector were launched again, aiming to enhance the development and widespread adoption of Sustainable Irrigation in an increasingly effective manner. On the one hand, it was emphasized the importance of encouraging **irrigation companies** to adopt the Sustainable Irrigation definition and the technical criteria, calling on **Institutions** to integrate irrigation into current and future regulatory classification systems, and collaborating with **standard and research bodies** to establish a universally recognized Sustainable Irrigation certification.

On the other hand, **the discussion highlighted the importance of collaboration across the entire water value chain, so to establish a Global Alliance among different stakeholders, inside and around irrigation, to share actions to safeguard water**. Particular emphasis was placed on multi-stakeholder cooperation, not only as a means to refine the technical criteria for assessing sustainability but also to develop a new global label for Sustainable Irrigation, providing a clear technical guideline, enabling the quantification of sustainability in agri-food products more

Speakers at the conference were, in order, **Moshi Berenstein**, President of the EIA and General Director of Netafim France, followed by **Dr. Bruno Molle**, Executive Advisor to the EIA, **Gregorio Davila Diaz**, Deputy Head of Unit for Environmental Sustainability at DG Agri - EU Commission, **Giulia Giuffrè**, Chief Sustainability Officer of Irritec and UN Global Compact SDG Pioneer for Water Management, **Francesco Dubini**, Professional at TEHA Group, **Francesca Portincasa**, General Director of Acquedotto Pugliese, and **Bruno Grawitz**, President of AFEID and Director at Societe du Canal de Provence.

TEHA Group, controlled by The European House – Ambrosetti S.p.A., is a company, with 300 people, operating since 1965, which has grown significantly over the years, thanks also to the contributions of many of its Partners, developing numerous activities in Italy, Europe and the rest of the world. Today the Group has a widespread presence in Italy and many offices abroad, in addition to other partnerships around the world. What distinguishes it is its ability to provide support to companies in the integrated and synergic management of the four critical aspects of value-creating processes: Seeing, Planning, Achieving and Optimizing. Each year we provide consulting to about 1,500 clients, including more than four hundred and fifty strategic scenarios and studies aimed at Italian and European institutions and companies, and around one hundred and twenty governance pacts for family-run businesses. In addition, each year about 3,500 Italian and international experts are involved in more than 850 events we organize for over 18,000 managers whom we follow in their personal and professional paths to growth. The Group vaunts an invaluable international network of contacts on the highest level in the sectors in which it operates, including top-level decision-makers within multinational institutions and on an individual country level. Since 2013, TEHA Group has been named — in the category Best Private Think Tanks — the no. 1 think tank in Italy, the no. 4 think tank in the European Union and among the most respected independents in the world out of 11,175 on a global level (source: “Global Go To Think Tanks Report” of the University of Pennsylvania). TEHA Group was recognized by Top Employers Institute as one of the 151 Top Employers 2025 in Italy. For more information, please visit www.ambrosetti.eu

The European Irrigation Association (EIA) is a non-profit-making organization, active since 1996, which represents irrigation professionals throughout Europe from the Agricultural and Landscape sectors. Its over 90 members include manufacturers, installers, contractors and distributors of irrigation equipment as well as researchers, designers and consultants. The EIA’s aim is to act as the leading voice of the Irrigation industry at the EU institutions and committees, promoting best practices and the transfer of know-how in all matters relating to irrigation water management. It members join forces to fight water scarcity by promoting the voice of resilient, sustainable and efficient irrigation solutions.