

## REUSE IN ITALY

# Italy aims to raise its game on water reuse

A new framework could pave the way for greater volumes of wastewater reuse in Italy. Broadening its appeal will depend on less stringent pathogen limits.

**W**astewater reuse is to become a focus of attention in Italy as the country struggles to counteract the growing impact of climate change on water availability, especially for agricultural use in the increasingly dry and hot summers it has been experiencing.

In late October, the Italian environment ministry announced that a framework agreement had been struck by 37 organisations that use large quantities of water in their activities. The aim of the agreement is to promote more efficient ways to use water, including reusing wastewater.

Currently, some 233 million m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater are reused in Italy every year, representing 2% of all water supplied. This is a relatively significant percentage in the European context, but still falls far short of what could be achieved.

Part of the problem is regulatory, according to Italian water reuse expert Roberto Mazzini, chairman of MilanoDepur

SpA, the company that runs Milan's Nose-do wastewater treatment plant, and a consultant to Veolia.

Wastewater reuse in Italy is regulated under law 185 dating back to 2003, which sets a limit of 10 CFU/100 ml – among the strictest in Europe – for faecal bacterium *Escherichia coli*. While such a strict limit is appropriate for water used to irrigate vegetables that are consumed raw (salads, for example), less stringent limits for other uses will become necessary if wastewater reuse is to increase significantly, Mazzini told GWI. He also said that other ministries, including those in charge of health and agriculture, would have to get involved if wastewater reuse in Italy is to be boosted.

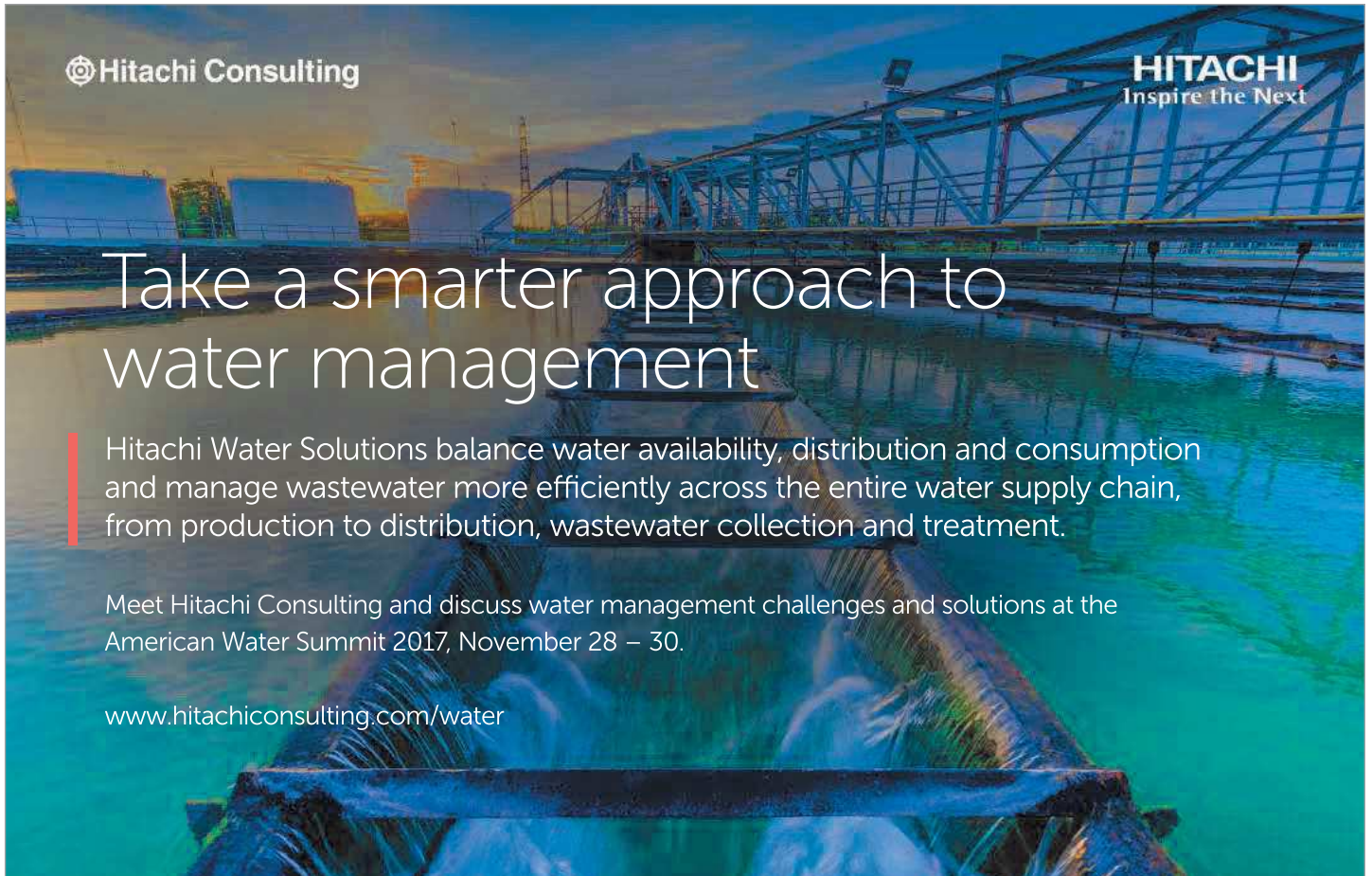
Nevertheless, Mazzini welcomed the environment ministry's initiative, and said that more efficient water use, especially in agriculture and animal husbandry – where more than half of Italy's water use is concentrated – will have to be prioritised.

Alongside the association of Italian water operators Utilitalia, Rome's water operator Acea was also a signatory to the environment ministry's agreement, but was unable to comment specifically on its plans going forward.

Although none of the other major Italian water operators signed up individually to the initiative, a spokesperson for Iren told GWI that its forthcoming industrial plan would “for the first time spell out a strategic role for sustainability, including wastewater reuse”.

The environment ministry said that its initiative is designed to bring stakeholders together under a shared set of aims, but deliberately stopped short of setting specific targets at this early stage.

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre is currently spearheading work on a draft directive on wastewater reuse, which is expected to surface before the end of 2017. ■



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