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Abteilung Wasser

Swiss Legislation and Its Implementation in Relation to PFAS and Other Current Issues Concerning Water Pollution

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21 October 2026, Swiss EurEau Water Summit 2026

Swiss Waters Face Multiple Pressures

- Climate change, drought and invasive species
- Pressures from urbanisation, industry, agriculture, hydropower and river engineering in the past
- Emerging contaminants, contaminated sites



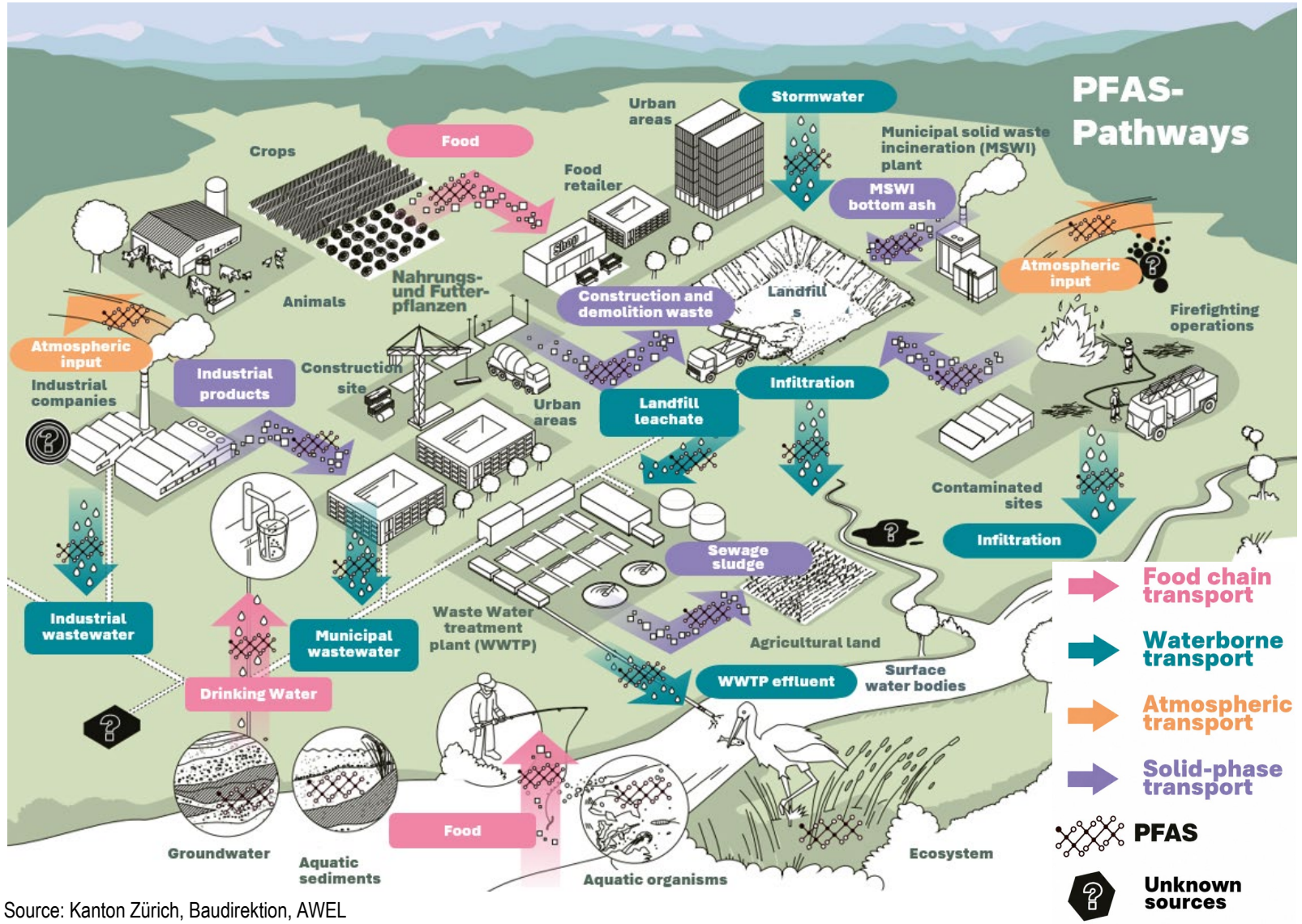
PFAS and Water – A Complex Topic

Sources and Pathways

Numerous sources and interconnected pathways

Impacts

Contamination of water resources, ecosystems and the food chain



Source: Kanton Zürich, Baudirektion, AWEL

PFAS: Challenges in Practice

WHAT IS STILL MISSING?

How do we assess PFAS?

- PFAS-specific standards and limit values
- Harmonised monitoring and assessment methods
- Clear assessment criteria across environmental compartments (e.g. water, soil, fish, meat and other food products)





IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

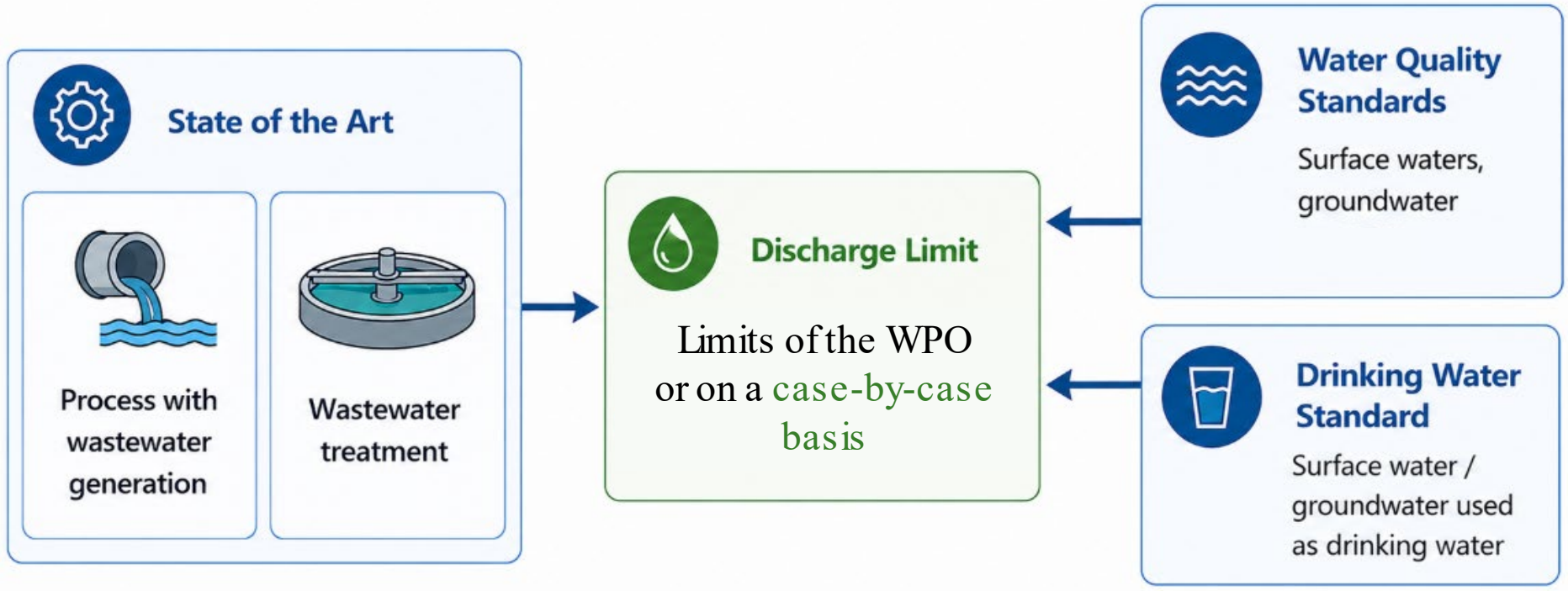
How do we deal with PFAS in practice?

- Complex sources and pathways
- Responsibilities across sectors and authorities
- Case-specific decisions and proportionate measures (e.g. contaminated sites, former firefighting training areas, food production)



Legal Principles for Discharge Requirements

- Minimise emissions through state-of-the-art measures
- Comply with applicable discharge limits
- Ensure compliance with water quality standards



Discharge limits are set case by case as part of the discharge permit, based on the state of the art, the receiving water body and recognised standards.

Current Political Mandates on PFAS

22.3929 **MOTION** (Maret)

Establish PFAS limits in federal ordinances

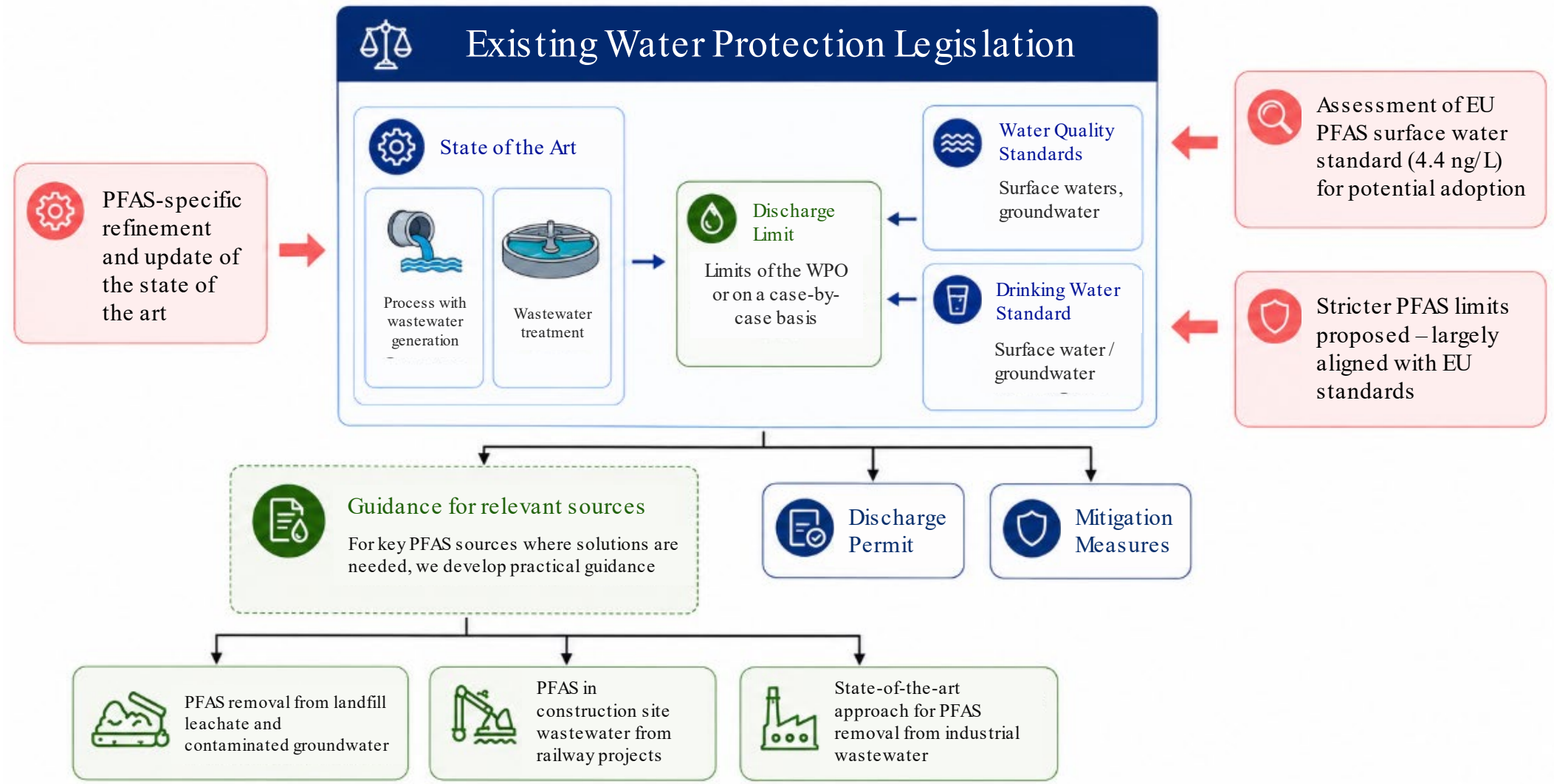
- Develop PFAS-specific limit values for water, soil, contaminated sites and waste
- Provide a harmonised legal basis for the cantons
- Strengthen protection and legal certainty

22.4585 **POSTULATE** (Moser)

Assessment of the need for a national action plan on persistent chemicals

- Assess risks and major sources
- Coordinate monitoring and risk management
- Identify options for reducing PFAS emission

PFAS in Water Protection: Taking Action Today



Case Study: Ceneri Base Tunnel (Canton Ticino)

SOURCE

PFBA-containing shotcrete accelerator used during tunnel construction

IMPACT

- Leaching by mountain water in tunnel drainage
- Groundwater contamination
- Drinking water limit values exceeded

MITIGATION

Activated carbon treatment of tunnel drainage

REGULATORY OUTCOME

- Directive to use PFAS-free construction products
- Monitoring of construction site wastewater
- Guidance for wastewater management



Responding to Emerging Contaminants

SITUATION

- 1,2,4-Triazole in Lake Geneva drinking water
- ~0.7 µg/L – 7x regulatory maximum level
- Scientific assessment - No immediate health risk identified

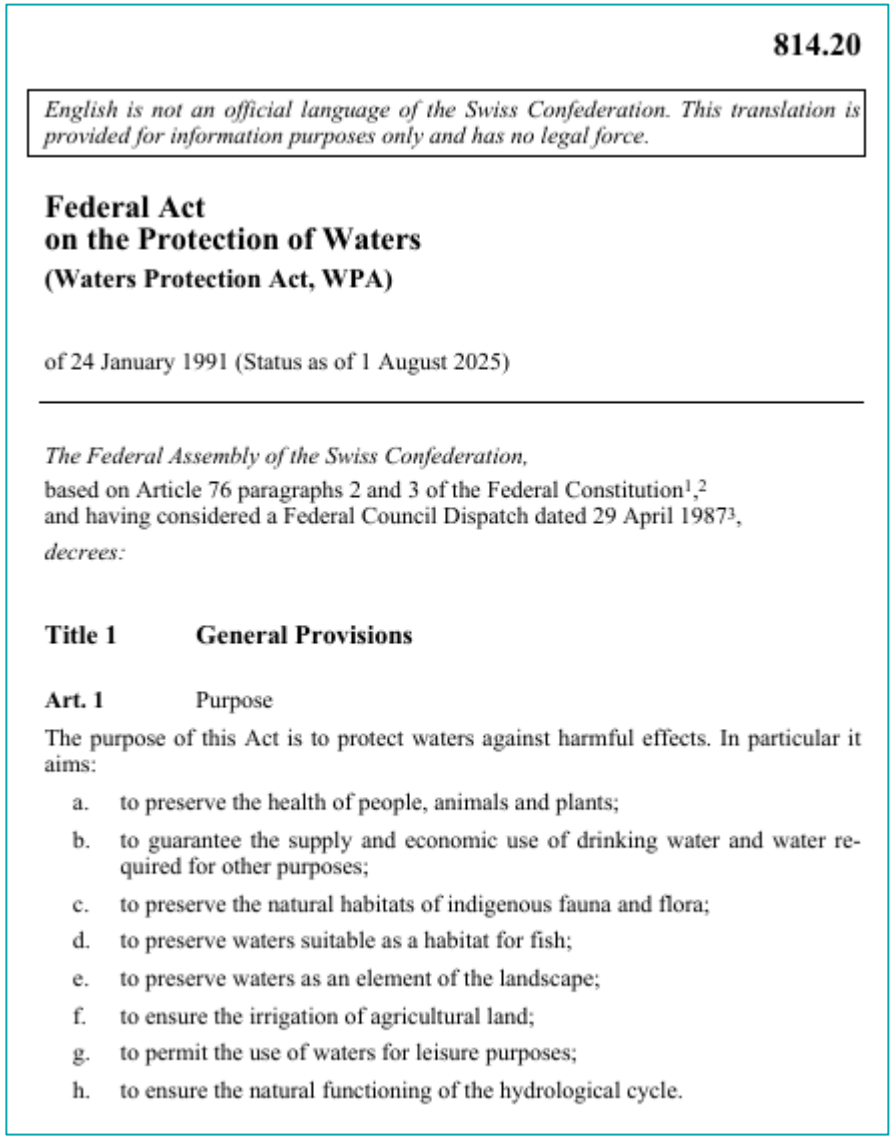
RESPONSE

- Immediate identification of the source and information of the public by cantons
- Source traced to industrial discharges into the upper Rhône, the main tributary
- Industry required to reduce or stop emissions and improve wastewater treatment
- Directive to drinking water suppliers to comply with limit values within three years



- PFAS require a systems approach
- Existing legislation enables action today
- Experience is translated into guidance and evolving regulation

Protecting water : many actions, a good Water Protection Act, but still too much reactive work.



814.20

English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. This translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.

Federal Act on the Protection of Waters
(Waters Protection Act, WPA)

of 24 January 1991 (Status as of 1 August 2025)

The Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation,
based on Article 76 paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Federal Constitution[1,2]
and having considered a Federal Council Dispatch dated 29 April 1987[3],
decrees:

Title 1 General Provisions

Art. 1 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to protect waters against harmful effects. In particular it aims:

a. to preserve the health of people, animals and plants;
b. to guarantee the supply and economic use of drinking water and water required for other purposes;
c. to preserve the natural habitats of indigenous fauna and flora;
d. to preserve waters suitable as a habitat for fish;
e. to preserve waters as an element of the landscape;
f. to ensure the irrigation of agricultural land;
g. to permit the use of waters for leisure purposes;
h. to ensure the natural functioning of the hydrological cycle.