

Fact Finding visit to Italy

(Valledora-Piemonte)

17 -18 December



The aim of this briefing is to provide summarised information for the delegation of the Committee on Petitions which is to visit the above-mentioned Valledora area in the Piedmont Region of Italy from 17 to 18 December 2018.

The fact-finding visit will include meetings with representatives of the government, local authorities and civil society.

The Valledora site, located in the provinces of Biella and Vercelli, forms a natural link between the two historic provinces and is made up of significant elements of environmental biodiversity and



landscape value. The area is situated close to the Anfiteatro Morenico di Ivrea¹ (SCI, Site of Community Interest) and Lake Viverone² (**SPA - Special Protection Area**). The plain is traversed by major irrigation channels bringing water from the Dora Baltea and Po.

The densely populated area forms part of the populous Piedmont Region (with approximately 4 400 000 residents) which was designated by the Lonely Planet guide as the best tourist destination for 2019.

The Valledora area has for many years been at the heart of major gravel and sand extraction operations, due to its favourable geological substrate, for use in building. Abandoned quarries have often been replaced and refilled with waste landfills.

Petition No 0909-2016³ criticises the serious environmental deterioration of the Valledora area, which at one time was predominantly agricultural. It is now home to landfills for household and industrial waste covering a total of 4 million m³.

The municipalities covered by the Valledora site are:

- 1) Municipality of Tronzano Vercellese (Province of Vercelli)
- 2) Municipality of Alice Castello (Province of Vercelli)
- 3) Municipality of Santhià (Province of Vercelli)
- 4) Municipality of Cavaglià (Province of Biella)



Valledora is regarded as one of the most important sites in northern Italy from the point of view of mineral deposits and has been designated under the Regional Water Protection Plan as a replenishment source of groundwater for human consumption.

The following landfills are within a radius of approximately 15 kilometres:

1. Alice 2site, currently undergoing remediation as a result of groundwater pollution, including a municipal waste landfill of approximately 500 000 m³,
2. landfill for special waste comparable to municipal waste, approximately 500 000 m³, and an 'environmental reinstatement' carried out with a further 1 200 000 m³ of waste,
3. landfill for waste asbestos,
4. landfill for special industrial waste, 800 000 m³ (A2A, formerly Caviglia Spa),
5. landfill for 'processed' municipal waste, approximately 500 000 m³ (ASRAB), managed using the 'bioreactor' method,
6. inert waste and similar waste landfill, 400 000 m³.

¹<http://www.piemonteparchi.it/cms/index.php/ambiente/educazione-ambientale/item/839-il-paesaggio-come-un-libro-aperto-sul-passato>

²<http://www.arpa.piemonte.it/approfondimenti/territorio/biella/acqua/Acque%20superficiali%20/approfondimenti-lago-di-viverone>

³ Declared admissible on 22 December 2016. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

There are also numerous quarries in Valledora:

1. 'Green cave' quarry in Santhià, extraction volume 4 590 000 m³, depth 20 m,
2. 'Valledora Spa' quarry in Cavaglià, estimated extraction volume 6 000 000 m³,
3. 'Green cave' quarry in Cavaglià, estimated extraction volume 2 000 000 m³, depth 35 m,
4. 'Fontana' quarry in Cavaglià, estimated extraction volume 2 000 000 m³, depth 30 m.



The 'Alice 2' site is said to have been discharging leachate into the groundwater for at least a decade. Although many years have passed since remediation began, and a further 1 200 000 m³ of special waste has now been landfilled at the site, the problems of contamination of the extensive groundwater have not been solved and are believed to be ongoing⁴.

In the light of this sensitive situation, a significant proportion of residents are protesting against the green light given on 16 June 2016 by the province of Biella

to an expansion of the landfill in the municipality of Cavaglià, at Gerbido, owned by the company 'A2A Ambiente Spa'⁵.

The project in question would have a serious environmental impact on an area of natural value that already suffers from several facilities with potentially harmful effects on quality of life and public health. The environmental risks are said to be increased because the area has just a single aquifer resource, and there is no distinction between the surface aquifer and the deep aquifer.

More generally, several representatives of the general public in Valledora stress that over the years there has been no appropriate comprehensive planning, and that this has led to a proliferation of industrial, extraction and waste disposal activities, damaging the aquifer systems⁶.

The permit for the expansion of the landfill was granted despite the opinion **of the ATO 2 Authority Biellese-Vercellese-Casalese**⁷, which considers that such a project, subject to the verdict of an

⁴https://www.lastampa.it/2016/02/27/vercelli/alice-la-discarica-diventa-sorvegliata-speciale-1KIKTEaeYMZ9Axv2DY7_n3O/pagina.html

⁵ Following the administrative appeal brought by the municipalities of the area, the expansion has been temporarily suspended by the Piedmont Regional Administrative Court (Tribunale Amministrativo regionale - TAR).

<https://www.lastampa.it/2018/10/10/biella/cavagli-nuovo-stop-alla-discarica-i-rifiuti-in-trasferta-fino-al-nuovi-aumenti-in-bolletta-czXITvmEZ26PGs67VIDFbO/premium.html>

⁶http://www.lasesia.vercelli.it/stories/provincia/5543_basta_giocare_dovete_bonificare/
<https://www.lastampa.it/2018/08/27/vercelli/Isos-dellarcivescovo-in-bici-e-a-rischio-lacqua-della-valledora-KINwhjoo5GHMCeA2yHNM9O/pagina.html>

⁷ <http://www.ato2piemonte.it/>

This is a public body, made up of the provinces, the mountain communities and mountain unions and the non-mountain municipalities. It is active over a territory of 177 municipalities, 6 mountain unions and 5 provinces, where there are 430 463 residents. The body carries out the tasks and functions of an integrated water service for the whole of its area of jurisdiction, identifying the integrative model, the form of management and commissioning, under agreements, from service managers, as well as monitoring operations, technical aspects and management.

As grounds for the opinion issued, the Piedmont ATO 2 Piemonte stressed that: (a) the Piedmont Region Water Protection Plan, approved by Regional Council Decision No 117-10731/2007, designates Valledora as a replenishment source of

environmental impact assessment, is incompatible with the aims of the Regional Water Protection Plan.

In May 2016, the municipalities of Tronzano Vercellese, Santhià and Alice Castello set up a 'Permanent Inter-municipal Observatory for the protection of the Valledora area'⁸. This body's aim is to develop and protect these territories, deemed to constitute significant environmental and human resources.

The Observatory criticises the serious public health problems caused by the Valledora facilities and supports sustainable development that pays particular attention to quality of life and the conservation of non-renewable resources. This body aims to constantly monitor the situation with the objective of implementing joint policies designed to prevent any new facility in Valledora that might constitute a risk factor in terms of the environment or public health.⁹

It would seem, therefore, that the expansion of the landfill sites does not take into account either the concerns of residents regarding their health, or, moreover, all the actions by public bodies expressing alarm about the environmental degradation of the Valledora area.

In its replies to the European Parliament of 2 May 2017 and 28 February 2018 concerning Petition No 0906/2016, the Commission initially stated that it was unable to clearly identify a potential breach of EU environmental law, emphasising that '*...it is for the Member State to decide which waste treatment facilities are most appropriate to treat the waste produced in its territory. Even though landfilling is not the optimal choice, being at the bottom of the waste hierarchy set out in the Waste Framework Directive¹⁰, if managed correctly and in accordance with the principles of the Landfill Directive¹¹, it is a legal way of disposing waste*'. Subsequently, the Commission stated '*In the light of the additional information provided by the petitioner, , the Commission intends to look more closely into this matter when monitoring the management of landfill sites in Italy in their operational and post-operational phase*'.

groundwater for human consumption. These source areas are among those subject to protection as referred to in Article 21(1) of Legislative Decree No 152/99 (now Article 94(1) of Legislative Decree No 152/06). (b)

⁸ <http://www.comune.tronzanovercellese.vc.it/Home/Menu?IDDettaglioPagina=61013>

⁹ The municipalities of the 2015 area have also promoted epidemiological studies. In view of the precautionary principle, these studies argue for the need for '*a restriction on the pressing environmental problems in the Valledora area; evidence for this approach is provided by the increases in some diseases observed in the epidemiological study. According to the international literature, their various possible causes include proximity of residence to uncontrolled landfills*'.
http://vercellioggi.it/dett_news.asp?id=65382

¹⁰ Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives, OJ L 312, 22.11.2008, pp. 3-30.

¹¹ Directive of the Council of 26 April 1999 on the landfill of waste, OJ L 182, 16.7.1999, pp. 1-19.



On 2 August 2017, the Italian Government replied to parliamentary question 4-14975, on the management of the 'Alice 2' landfill and on the corresponding environmental pollution risks. In this regard, it should be noted that :

'[...] With reference to pollution of the groundwater in the area of the Alice Castello landfill, on the basis of the data available on the Sintai platform, managed by Ispra, the monitoring data on the concentrations of iron, nickel, manganese and ammonia are of particular interest. The data analysed are the most recent available, relating both to the reporting under the Water Framework Directive 2009-2015 and the SoE-Eionet reporting¹² (2015).

The body of groundwater in question has the identification code IT01GWB-S1 and is called 'Novarese-Biellese-Vercellese Plain' (Itb river basin district). The body of water has two sampling stations for groundwater, in which the operational monitoring programme is carried out, with two samples per year, as the body of water is classified as at risk of not reaching the environmental targets (good environmental state) under the Water Framework Directive.

With regard to the pollutants referred to above, the following assessments are from the SoE-Eionet data (2015):

Iron: on the basis of the monitoring data sent, the environmental quality standard concentration value (EQS, table 2, Annex 5, Part IV of Legislative Decree No 152 of 2006) of 200 µg/l has not been exceeded in any station in the monitoring network; the concentration values of the two samples were lower than 30 per cent of the EQS, the value which under Legislative Decree No 219 of 2010 must not be exceeded by the limit of quantification (Loq) of the method used, equal to 50 µg/l;

Manganese: in this case too, as for iron, the EQS concentration value (table 2, Annex 5, Part IV of Legislative Decree No 152 of 2006) of 50 µg/l has not been exceeded in any station; the concentration values of the two samples were lower than 30 per cent of the EQS, the value which under Legislative Decree No 21 of 2010 must not be exceeded by the Loq of the method used, equal to 5 µg/l;

Ammonia: the EQS concentration value of 500 µg/l (Table 3, point B, Part A of Annex I of Legislative Decree No 152 of 2006) has not been exceeded in any sampling station; the concentration values of the two

¹² Eionet is the acronym of the European Environment Information and Observation Network, which is a partnership network of the European Environment Agency: <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/>

samples were lower than 30 per cent of the EQS, the value which under Legislative Decree No 219 of 2010 must not be exceeded by the Loq of the method used, equal to 40 µg/l;

*Nickel: for this element **cases were found where the EQS has been exceeded in the groundwater** in one of the two monitoring stations. The EQS value is 20 µg/l (Table 3, Point B, Part A of Annex I to Legislative Decree No 152 of 2006), but concentration values of 47 and 43 µg/l were measured. In the second monitoring station the concentration values were lower than the EQS and equal, in the two monitoring sessions, to 15 and 12 µg/l, with an Loq of 2 µg/l [...].'*

On this point, the written reply from the Government's Minister for the Environment, then in post, stated:

*'[...] It is noted, in addition, that, on the basis of the reporting data sent in the most recent management cycle of the river basin district on the Wise-Sintai platform, **the chemical status of the IT01GWB-S1 body of groundwater was classified, on the basis of the 2014 data, as 'not good'¹³ because the maximum concentration values for nickel had been exceeded.** The confidence level of this classification, again on the basis of the reporting data, is high, which indicates that the classification carried out is highly reliable.*

Moreover, on the basis of the Po River Basin District Management Plan (Itb) the date for achieving the environmental quality targets pursuant to the Water Framework Directive for this specific body of groundwater was set for the 2022-2027 management cycle'.

¹³<https://www.lastampa.it/2017/08/09/biella/valledora-allarmenichel-nelle-acque-falde-a-rischio-secondo-i-dati-del-ministero-dellambiente-ShRHUSO0a1ZkVg4WI0xUkk/pagina.html>

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