

**Question for written answer E-006854/2015  
to the Commission**

Rule 130

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Subject: 'River thieves'

The River Po, which flows through the Italian regions of Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto, is a stomping ground for hundreds of so-called 'river thieves' who illegally catch vast amounts of fish with the intention of exporting them.

The highly prized and varied species of fauna, flora and ichthyofauna that populate the River Po have led to it being awarded the status of a site of Community importance (SCI) and special protection area (SPA).

Over the period spanning April to July 2014, the Italian State Forest Department carried out dozens of operations in the commune of Rovigo alone that led to the seizure of approximately 100 quintals of stolen fish and revealed the following:

- these illegal fishermen operate during the night using close-meshed nets covering several hundred metres and most likely employ electrical stunners as well;
- they fish without restrictions or respect for mating seasons or size and make no distinction between species;
- they smuggle live fish in cramped, miserable conditions for days at a time.

In light of the fact that the invasive techniques employed by these fishermen have already led to the destruction of the Danube delta ecosystem, can the Commission please answer the following questions:

1. How does it plan to protect the biodiversity of the various SCIs, SPAs and areas included in the Natura 2000 network that are located close to the banks and water of the River Po?
2. How does it plan to promote transnational cooperation between police forces with regard to offences against the environment?