

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-003615/23
to the Commission
Nicolás González Casares (S&D)
(11 December 2023)**

Subject: Deaths of bivalves in Galician estuaries

Bivalves in the Galician estuaries, particularly Arousa and Muros/Noia, are dying in large numbers (with declines of up to 77% for species like the common cockle), which also means significant losses for the hundreds of people whose livelihood relies on farming and collecting bivalves. The reasons behind the higher mortality are unknown, but all signs point towards multiple causes.

Monitoring inland waters is not one of the European Commission's responsibilities, but protecting and restoring the health of our seas and oceans is one of the goals of Horizon Europe, and protecting biodiversity in estuaries is crucial for those systems and for a number of areas protected by the Natura 2000 network and other EU protection measures.

In light of the above:

1. Has the Regional Government of Galicia submitted a request for this problem to be studied under Horizon Europe?
2. Has the Regional Government of Galicia contacted the Commission or any of its agencies to raise concerns or request support or advice on this matter or vice-versa?
3. Does the Commission believe the growing mortality of shellfish in the estuaries is concerning for their ecological balance of those estuaries?

Submitted: 11.12.2023

**Answer given by Ms Ivanova on behalf of the European Commission
(21 February 2024)**

1. In the Horizon Europe Programme ⁽¹⁾, regions do not submit a request but they can be beneficiaries in proposals, following the publication of the relevant calls' topics.

Biodiversity and ecosystems are included in Horizon Europe and covered in the assessment of cumulative impacts and monitoring. These are European wide projects. For instance, the University of Vigo is a partner of the ACTNOW project ⁽²⁾ on impacts of different stressors.

2. The Commission is not aware of contacts on this matter. LIFE, the EU funding programme for the environment and climate action ⁽³⁾, has supported wastewater treatment and sustainable fisheries projects in Galicia and on bivalves in Spain and Portugal.

The 2014-2020 ⁽⁴⁾ and 2021-2027 European Regional Development Fund programmes of Galicia have foreseen funds for the protection of biodiversity, natural areas, and water management. Member States are responsible for project selection in line with the programme's objectives.

3. Shellfish mortality is a matter of concern. There are several special areas of conservation designated in estuaries for which Spain must establish conservation objectives including measures to address the mortality of bivalves. The Commission is monitoring the fulfilment of this obligation in the framework of an infringement procedure ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

⁽²⁾ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060072>

⁽³⁾ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en

⁽⁴⁾ The eligibility period for this programme finished on 31 December 2023.

⁽⁵⁾ (INFR)2015/2003.