

*(English version)*

**Priority question for written answer P-000033/24  
to the Commission  
Nicolás González Casares (S&D)  
(9 January 2024)**

*Subject:* Plastic pellet pollution

On 8 December 2023, the container ship *Toconao* lost six containers loaded with plastic pellets off the coast of Portugal. This has resulted in the pollution of the coastline in Galicia and has reached northern Spain and, apparently, even France. Unfortunately, faced with this serious problem, the Galician Government has been passive, and there has been a serious lack of information to the local authorities and a complete lack of coordination.

Tackling micro-plastic pollution is one of the Commission's priorities and already in its 2021 action plan it had proposed to reduce releases by 30% by 2030 and in October 2023 it presented a proposal for a regulation to strengthen the prevention of plastic pellet losses and reduce them by up to 74%.

In the light of the above:

1. Is the Commission aware of the pollution caused by this spill, has the Xunta de Galicia contacted the Commission on this matter, and is the Commission considering activating a European protocol in view of the fact that the pollution affects several Member States?
2. What is the Commission's assessment of the statement by the Xunta that such plastic pellets are neither toxic nor dangerous?
3. What is the opinion of the European Environment Agency on the polluting potential of the release of these pellets into the sea?

Submitted: 9.1.2024

**Answer given by Mr Sinkevičius on behalf of the European Commission  
(5 March 2024)**

The Commission is aware of the maritime pollution by plastic pellets that is affecting Spanish coasts and participated in the Plenary session of the European Parliament in January 2024 on this matter.

In January 2024, Spain requested assistance for Copernicus satellite imagery to obtain information on the location of the lost containers in question.

Consequently, the Maritime Support Services Contingency Plan was activated and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) <sup>(1)</sup>, and Commission received this information.

Portugal reported the incident in question to the Union Maritime Information and Exchange System (SafeSeaNet) <sup>(2)</sup>, hosted by EMSA.

SafeSeaNet provides for the sharing between Member States of information including on containers lost at sea and was duly activated in the Galician incident.

As investigations to assess the impacts of the incident are ongoing at the national level, it is premature to draw any conclusion at this stage. Plastic pellets cause adverse impacts on the environment and potential impacts on human health.

The potential of pellets to act as a carrier for absorbed toxicants or pathogenic microorganisms is part of the problem. These impacts can arise where pellets are found, such as in soils, lakes, rivers, estuaries, beaches, lagoons, seas and oceans.

The European Environment Agency <sup>(3)</sup> does not have the mandate nor systems to monitor such spills and relies on the European Environment Information and Observation Network <sup>(4)</sup> of member countries representing competent authorities to understand ongoing pollution situations.

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<sup>(1)</sup> <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/>

<sup>(2)</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/maritime/eu-wide-digital-maritime-system-and-services/union-maritime-information-and-exchange-system-safeseanet\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/maritime/eu-wide-digital-maritime-system-and-services/union-maritime-information-and-exchange-system-safeseanet_en)

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en>

<sup>(4)</sup> <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/>