

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1499/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Zebra mussels and transfers from the Ebro

The zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) is a bivalve mollusc some 3 centimetres in size, similar in appearance to the common mussel. The population explosion that results when these mussels are introduced makes it virtually impossible to stop them colonising the various natural and artificial substrata encountered in the freshwater environment. They feed on phytoplankton, for which they compete with other autochthonous species, disrupting the ecological balance. The pseudofaeces they expel cover the beds of rivers and reservoirs forming a cloak that is toxic to humans and also eliminates all fish in the zone concerned. The colonisation capacity of these mussels enables them to block irrigation channels, intakes and outtakes of power stations, hydraulic constructions of all types, turbines, drainage channels, tanks, engines and anchors of vessels, water treatment plants, streams and watercourses and even to totally obstruct pipes and pipelines. In the early 1980s they were introduced into the North American Great Lakes. Efforts to control the species have already cost some two billion dollars and, despite this large-scale investment, it is now firmly established.

During summer 2001 the presence of zebra mussels was detected in the Ebro (at the Riba Roja reservoir and at various points between Flix and Xerta). In the space of a few months, the species became commonplace from the Riba Roja reservoir to the Ebro delta. It has recently been found in the irrigation systems of Les Garrigues and Terra Alta, more than 20 kilometres from where it initially appeared, having reached the area as a result of normal water harnessing.

1. Does the Commission know what measures the Spanish Government is taking to eradicate this pest?
2. Are any of these measures 100% effective? If not, what measures would be 100% effective?
3. Will the Commission support the funding of the National Hydrological Plan, under which it is proposed to transfer infected waters (from the river Ebro) to other river basins?
4. Would a transfer be legal under such circumstances? Would it not be in breach of the habitats directive prohibiting the introduction of non-native species?
5. Does the Commission plan to take a decision on the National Hydrological Plan before or after the eradication of this pest?