

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0791/04  
by Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Encroachments on Ria Formosa Nature Reserve (Natura 2000)

In 1999, the Portuguese government designated the Ria Formosa Nature Reserve (to the south of Faro, in the Algarve) as a special protection zone in accordance with Article 4 of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC<sup>1</sup>). Under pressure from the advancing tourism industry, Ria Formosa seems fated to become a pawn in the game of project developers who - according to semi-official plans - wish to develop a total of 21 golf courses and 9 marinas, in addition to 10 building sites intended for flats and villas (Source: Expresso, 11 August 2001).

In recent years, some 25 species of brooding migratory birds have wholly or partly disappeared in the area, including the kingfisher, night heron, red-legged partridge, red-crested pochard and purple heron. Birds of prey have also declined dramatically, because rabbits, hares and hedgehogs have already disappeared.

Woodland has been (unlawfully) cleared, and some forest fires appear not to have ignited spontaneously. The Ria Formosa Reserve (a good 23 000 hectares) seems unlikely to be given protection by the authorities, and is being neglected. Unique sand-dune vegetation in marshland areas is dying out owing to pollution from sewerage effluent from streams discharging into the lagoons. The polluted water is increasing the risk of malaria. The Portuguese Office of Statistics (INE) reports that 12 persons died of malaria in Portugal in 2001 (The News, 14 February 2004).

Does the European Commission agree that this unique nature reserve is being sacrificed to economic activities that conflict with the special protection intended to apply to Ria Formosa?

Will the European Commission draw the Portuguese authorities' attention to the inappropriate development taking place in and around the Ria Formosa nature reserve area?

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<sup>1</sup> OJ 103, 25.4.1979, p. 1.