

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0818/04  
by Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Sludge storage in Ingensche Waarden

Gelderland Province in the Netherlands intends to grant licences for the storage of 11 million cubic metres of sludge in a sand-recovery area near Ingen. The project provides for putting two suction-pump extractors to work to deepen the existing sand pit from 25 to about 40 metres.

The intention, for an expected period of some 15 to 20 years, is to store (dredger) sludge, much of it removed from river beds. Class 3 and 4 sludge contains heavy metals, in particular.

The outer limits of the Ingensche Waarden are - as part of the Lower Rhine - designated as a special protection area (SPA) under Natura 2000. The area is well-known as a wintering habitat for Bewick's swan and the white-fronted goose, and as a brooding habitat for the cornkrake.

According to the compulsory environmental impact report (EIR) there will - as a result of the storage - be no significant disruptive impact.

The EIR fails, even so, to consider any alternative to storing the sludge, such as processing as clinker or brick, or as road-building material.

Nor is there any mention of offsetting (natural) measures. The rural EIR committee notes that there is no mention in the EIR of the gap in knowledge surrounding expectations of the actual effects of concentrations on pollution of flora and fauna.

During and after storage of the dredged sludge, local water quality can be expected to deteriorate temporarily. For some substances a temporary overshoot of the maximum permitted risk level (MPR) cannot be excluded. The potential eco(toxico)logical risks of such situations for specified guide species are not quantified in the EIR.

Special protection areas are subject to the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Assessment Framework, which stipulate that encroachment on the natural characteristics of such areas is only permitted if there are no alternatives and there are urgent reasons of overriding public interest.

Does the Commission consider that the intended action is in conflict with the principles underlying the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and Natura 2000?

Will the Commission arrange to screen all activities in special protection areas, not least the Waal and Lower-Rhine basin area?