

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1799/09
by Willy Meyer Pleite (GUE/NGL)
to the Commission

Subject: Desertification in the Doñana Natural Park (Andalusia)

The report drawn up by the Scientific Research Centre (Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)) draws devastating conclusions on the future of the Doñana Natural Park (Andalusia) - the largest nature reserve in Europe, which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO - after it was found that there has been 'a dramatic decline in the level of the water table caused by the extraction of underground water to supply the Matalascañas urban development'. The report states that the Doñana lagoons will continue to dry up unless the extraction of underground water by the Matalascañas urban development is controlled and regulated. This development houses almost 100 000 people in the summer and requires enormous quantities of water to meet normal consumption demands for running water, as well as demand stemming from the leisure facilities that form part of the development.

The CSIC takes the view that preserving the aquifer is 'the key to conserving the Doñana. However, underground water has been extracted at an alarming rate for several decades, and this has caused a significant deterioration in the Doñana's ecosystems'.

The aggressive urban development, tourism and farming practices that are being permitted are drying up the underground aquifers that maintain wetland biodiversity. Far from taking the appropriate measures recommended in order to prevent this negative impact on the local ecosystem, urban development and agricultural projects are being allowed to multiply in the area. As I reported in my question to the Commission E-1976/08, cooperatives belonging to the Plan Almonte Marismas have complained at the existence of around 2 000 hectares of irrigated land that are putting pressure on the over-exploited aquifer 27. This situation is being further exacerbated by the planting of eucalyptus subsidised by the Andalusian Government.

1. Is the Commission aware of the conclusions of the above report?
2. What is the Commission's view on the facts described above, in the light of the report drawn up by the CSIC?
3. What measures will the Commission take to prevent a protected natural park and biosphere reserve, whose conservation is financed by European funds, from being condemned to desertification because environmentally unsustainable practices are being permitted in the surrounding area?