

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3101/09
by Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Is Finland breaching the requirements of the Habitats Directive as regards the protection of the Saimaa ringed seal?

The voluntary measures prescribed in the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's new regulation on certain fishing restrictions in lake Saimaa are insufficient to meet the requirements for the protection of the Saimaa ringed seal under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)¹, particularly taking into account EU Court of Justice case C-117/00 (Commission v. Ireland).

There is scientific evidence that permitting fishing in its current form endangers the conservation of the Saimaa ringed seal, and that voluntary measures are insufficient. I refer in particular to the publication by Tero Sipilä and Tuomo Kokkonen entitled 'Saimaannorppakannan tila vuonna 2008' (Saimaa ringed seal population: the situation in 2008), Metsähallitus Finnish Forestry Administration, Southern Finland Natural Heritage Services, document no. 707/41/2009, 16 March 2009.

Furthermore, the revised regulation does not contain a ban on fishing with nets in the spring, which is essential to protect the pups' chances of survival. Of the 50-60 pups born each year, as many as half are drowned in fishermen's nets in their first year of life. The Saimaa ringed seal is classified as a critically endangered species.

Can the Commission please clarify whether Finland is breaching the requirements of the Habitats Directive and whether it is acting contrary to the case law of the EU Court of Justice regarding the protection of the Saimaa ringed seal?

¹ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.