

**Question for written answer E-5459/2010
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Edward Scicluna (S&D)

Subject: Water supply in Malta

Malta is facing an imminent crisis of its only water resource, i.e. its groundwater supply. Ground water is being extracted at a greater rate than the rate at which it is replenished and water experts believe that by the year 2025, Malta could run out of water fit for human consumption. This dire situation facing the Maltese Islands was highlighted in the FAO Malta Water Resources Review 2006, which set the framework for a National Water Policy that would also address Malta's obligations with regard to the EU Water Framework Directive. Yet Malta's National Water Policy has not yet seen the light of day.

There are 8500 registered boreholes and an unknown number of unregistered boreholes that tap groundwater, probably making Malta the country with the highest groundwater extraction density in the world. Malta's aquifers can provide a sustainable groundwater yield of between 12 and 23 million cubic metres every year.

However, estimates show that 35 million cubic metres from private and public boreholes are being extracted today and the rate of extraction is increasing – resulting in salinization of the aquifers. Groundwater extraction is not metered and not billed, i.e. groundwater extraction is free. Since only the public water utility (the Water Services Corporation) has a licence to extract groundwater, the 8500+ private boreholes are therefore extracting water illegally.

Is the Commission aware that despite the Water Framework Directive's (2000/60EC¹) insistence that Member States must promote sustainable and environmentally friendly water consumption practices, the Maltese government continues to allow various illegal borehole users to utilise water free of charge?

In 2000, the European Union set a deadline of December 2009 for the filing of water management policy. How does the Commission plan to proceed, since the Maltese government has failed to provide the Commission with the required information on the implementation of the directive, as stipulated by the Water Framework Directive?

What guarantees can the Commission give to Maltese citizens that as members of the European Union they will not lose their only source of natural groundwater through non-adherence to EU law?

¹ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.