

**Question for written answer E-008448/2011
to the Commission**

Rule 117

Clemente Mastella (PPE) and Antonello Antinoro (PPE)

Subject: Urgent support measures for mussel cultivation in Taranto (Italy)

On 22 July 2011, the local health authority in Taranto (Italy) issued an order (No 1989) imposing a ban on the cultivation and sale of farmed mussels at the city's inner bay (the 'Mar Piccolo'), following the discovery of excessively high traces inside the mussels of toxic compounds including PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) and dioxins.

Over decades, heavy industry and petrochemical production have contaminated the local waters and ecosystems. In this specific case, the pollution appears to have been the result of the discharge into the waters of chemical agents impacting gravely on the environment and its aquaculture.

Can the Commission state:

1. whether it is aware of this grave problem;
2. what information it has on the causes of the rise in dioxin and PCB levels identified in the mussels, and what measures it believes should be taken to avoid this recurring;
3. what initiatives it will take in the interests of consumer protection to deal with this mussel crisis in Taranto;
4. whether, and if so by what means, it will call on the Italian government and local bodies to provide full information on the situation in Taranto in its health, food safety and environmental aspects, with a view to creating an effective and rapid early warning system;
5. whether it does not believe it necessary and desirable to call for support measures for the cultivators concerned, in order to prevent a total collapse of the market in mussels;
6. whether it does not believe that with the recognition of this market crisis it could be possible to authorise national measures of an extraordinary nature to protect production and employment, such as postponing tax and bank payment deadlines or reducing insurance contributions for the cultivators affected by this emergency?