

**Question for written answer E-003148/2013  
to the Commission**

Rule 117

**Andrew Henry William Brons (NI)**

Subject: Fungal infections devastating trees in UK and Europe

In the *Financial Times*<sup>1</sup>, Robin Lane Fox states that the lax trade in vegetation across European borders is causing the devastation of trees both in the UK and in Europe.

He says that before the UK joined the EU it was necessary to secure a permit from the UK to purchase specimen plants in Germany, for example, which was inspected by the German supplier; the specimens then had to be inspected on arrival in the UK.

'Most of these bio-invaders have been imported in nursery-stock from abroad. The plant certificate system is a shambles. I have seen photos of the "certificat phytosanitaire" which French officials [...] attached to the [...] cluster of sweet chestnuts which brought the [...] sweet chestnut blight to us from France last year. Inspectors tend to look only at the leaves and not at the leaves of everything which is being shipped.' Mr Lane Fox continues: 'Some of the infected ash trees came from there, others from Poland and Scandinavia. One of the dendrologists told me that he had discovered how many official inspections for phytophthora took place in the EU's Ireland last year. The answer, extorted under the Freedom of Information Act, was [...] 19. In Britain there were thousands.'

In Portugal, Mr Lane Fox says, there was only one official plant inspector in 1995, 'because I met a man who knew the entire expert team. The total was one, who lived in Lisbon and did not even have a car.' He continues: 'Are there more than 10 inspectors looking out for deadly oak moths in insect-friendly Poland? In the nationalised park of Rigolin near Poznań there are 1 500 superb ancient oaks, a global treasure. They are now being killed by a boring beetle. This borer, a cerambix, cannot be controlled because another committee of the EU, the one for eurobugs, has registered it as a rarity and given it a protection order. East Asia, too, has been generous with consignments of natural born killers, but the EU inspectors have failed to keep them out. Their plant health protocol is drawn up to facilitate "free trade", but not to protect the environment.'

Is the Commission aware of the diseases that are devastating UK and European vegetation, and does it intend to do nothing whilst our green heritage is gradually extirpated?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/6a7e33ec-2a52-11e2-a137-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2O4ZsQsBr>