

**Question for written answer E-013362/2013
to the Commission**

Rule 117

María do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE)

Subject: Ban on the capture of three species of rays (Regulations (EU) No 1262/2012, No 39/2013 and No 40/2013)

Regulations (EC) No 1262/2012, No 39/2013 and No 40/2013 prohibit the capture of a number deep-sea species, including three species of ray – the undulate ray (*Raja undulata*), the bottlenose skate (*Rostroraja alba*) and the common skate (*Dipturus batis*) – which live along the coast of mainland Portugal.

This ban is in place because these rays are endangered in Europe. However, given that the distribution of these species covers a very wide area, they are not endangered in all European waters. According to observations by operators in the sector, there are abundant stocks of these rays off the coast of mainland Portugal and they are an available fishing resource that could be exploited sustainably. For example, the undulate ray (*Raja undulata*), a species with more coastal distribution, is often observed in estuaries and coastal lagoons. This fact means that it is warranted to conduct a pilot study to provide a scientific assessment of how abundant ray stocks are and possibly amend EU legislation in line with the real situation of these stocks off the coast of mainland Portugal.

According to the ICES guidelines for 2013-2014 on rays in subareas VIII and IX, species in this group are endangered to varying degrees; they also propose adopting management measures tailored to each species and fishery, and consider protection of the species' reproductive phase to be vital. In this regard, it should be pointed out that Portugal has legislation in force with management measures specifically for this purpose, namely Order No 315/2001, which prohibits the capture of rays using any kind of fishing gear during May, reducing fishing effort during the species' reproductive period and promoting self-regeneration of ray populations off the coast of mainland Portugal.

Considering that Portugal already has legislation in place specifically to protect rays:

1. Is the Commission considering the possibility of supporting pilot studies to assess how abundant these species are?
2. If scientific data confirm that the three aforementioned species can be fished sustainably off the coast of mainland Portugal, will the Commission consider authorising fishing for them?