

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1108/04
by Dorette Corbey (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Drilling for gas in the Waddenzee

On 15 March 2004, the newspaper NRC Handelsblad reported that the Advisory Group on Policy on the Waddenzee had advised the Netherlands Government to permit the extraction of 40 billion m³ of natural gas from the Waddenzee because there were no ecological grounds for a fresh moratorium on extraction. If any subsidence were to occur as a result, the Advisory Group argues, the drilling could be halted. In the answer to my question to the Commission in 1999 (P-2297/99¹) the Commission stressed that naturally the precautionary principle applied. In case of doubt, nothing should be done unless a reason existed based on the overriding public interest. If it could be demonstrated that the extraction would have a significant adverse impact, compensatory measures should be taken to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 was protected. The Commission also mentioned that the term 'significant effect' in Article 6 of the Habitats Directive had a broader meaning than 'irreversible effect'.

1. Does the Commission agree that there is a genuine risk of subsidence and that the precautionary principle must apply?
2. In relation to the anticipated subsidence, is it possible to take compensatory measures in advance? Is interference with the sand and sediment deposits an acceptable disruption of the natural environment in the Waddenzee?
3. In the interests of nature conservation, the Waddenzee ought to be left in peace as a unique natural area. In the light of the Green Paper on the security of energy supply, the EU's growing dependence on gas imports (up to 70% in 20 or 30 years' time) and rising gas prices, can the Commission confirm or deny that in fact there is an overriding public interest in postponing the extraction of 40 billion m³ of natural gas for at least 20 years and reassessing in 2025 whether gas extraction in the Waddenzee is in the public interest?

¹ OJ C 225 E, 8.8.2000, p. 91.