

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3446/06
by Joost Lagendijk (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Gas extraction in the Waddenzee

On Thursday, 6 July 2006, the Netherlands Government issued 31 permits for gas extraction from the Waddenzee. As a result, Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM) is permitted to start extracting gas immediately. The total quantity is to be 20 billion cubic metres - enough to supply the whole of the Netherlands with gas for approximately eight months.

In an answer to a written question (E-2281/05) by Kathalijne Buitenweg concerning the decision by the Netherlands Government to drill for gas in the Waddenzee, the Commission replied on 27 June 2005 that, before issuing a permit for the project, the Netherlands Government would have to conduct an assessment pursuant to the Habitats Directive.

The permits issued are based on the environmental impact assessment of January 2006, which concluded that, despite a lower rate of extraction due to the 'hand on the tap' policy, the mudflats in the Lauwersmeer might still subside. It is also uncertain whether the supply of artificial sand will be able to keep pace with the extra subsidence caused by gas extraction.

1. Is it now certain that the plans do not contravene the Wild Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds) and the Habitats Directive?

2. Does the Commission believe that, despite the risks posed to the area by the extraction of a relatively small quantity of gas, the project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive)?

(a) If so, are the measures to compensate for gas extraction adequate to limit the impact on the area?

(b) If not, what steps will the Commission take?