

**Priority question for written answer P-001362/2023
to the Commission**

Rule 138

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Subject: Potential existence of a parallel and illegal market selling undersized catches in the Netherlands

On 14 April 2023, the Dutch police conducted an operation targeting five fishing boats in Vlissingen, the Netherlands. The search was part of an investigation led by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) into the existence of an illegal trade in fish below the minimum size. As 100% of the vessels searched by the police that day were indeed committing fraud and, according to the authorities, other similar offences are likely, there are real concerns of a parallel and illegal market selling undersized catches in the Netherlands.

The existence of a potential black market would be harmful for all European fishing communities who are currently complying with strict rules on fishing. It would also undermine the efforts made by the European Union to conserve resources, since these undersized fish are caught too young for stocks to be able to renew. At a time when the EU is working to tighten its rules on monitoring fisheries, perhaps it should first ensure – for the sake of consistency – that existing rules are being correctly applied.

Will the Commission, together with the European Fisheries Control Agency, carry out in-depth inspections to tackle the various issues raised in this case?

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