

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001853/24
to the Commission
Carmen Crespo Díaz (PPE)
(27 September 2024)**

Subject: Measures to support the Spanish and Portuguese fleets affected by the proliferation of the invasive species of Asian seaweed (*Rugulopteryx okamurae*)

The Iberian Atlantic fishing fleet is suffering serious consequences owing to the proliferation in their fishing grounds, over the last two years, of the invasive species *Rugulopteryx okamurae*, better known as Asian seaweed. This species originally appeared on the coasts of Portugal and in the Gulf of Cadiz in Spain and has been spreading along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, causing numerous losses to the fleets in these fishing areas, as this species invades fishing grounds, preventing fishing altogether in some areas. Asian seaweed was included in the Spanish catalogue of exotic species compiled by the Spanish Government's Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO).

However, the Spanish fleet is not receiving aid from the Spanish Government or European funds to alleviate the impact of these losses.

In view of the above:

1. Does the Commission intend to provide aid to the fishing fleet to alleviate the effects of this invasive algae?
2. Has the Spanish Government asked the Commission for aid for the fleet — or for research to be carried out — with a view to halting the spread of this species?

Submitted: 27.9.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(31 October 2024)**

The Commission is aware of the serious problems that the species *Rugulopteryx okamurae* is causing in various coastal areas of Andalucía and in other Spanish areas such as Ceuta and south of Portugal.

On the basis of a risk assessment submitted by the competent Spanish authorities, *Rugulopteryx okamurae* was included in 2022 on the list of the invasive alien species to which priority should be given ⁽¹⁾. Regrettably, this invasive alga continues to expand, and has reached France and Italy in recent years.

The affected Member States can decide how and when to provide financial support to fishers affected by invasive species through their European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture (EMFAF) programme.

This can include measures for tackling the spread of the species, as well as directly supporting fishers for example with cleaning, repairing equipment and antifouling.

Based on the information received from the Spanish authorities, it appears that the Spanish Ministry of Environment has been working on research and plans to manage the crisis.

The Commission has also been informed that the Spanish EMFAF Managing Authority has carried out an analysis on support options.

The Commission is however not aware of financing decisions by this Authority. Nevertheless, the Commission has also been informed that the authorities provided *de minimis* State aid to the sector for the loss of fishing activity and damaged fishing gear outside the EMFAF programme.

In the case of Portugal, the national authorities informed the Commission that no support under EMFAF was provided or is planned at this stage.

For more information on the national/regional support measures implemented, we refer the Honourable Member to the competent authorities in the Member States.

⁽¹⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1203 of 12 July 2022 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) 2016/1141 to update the list of invasive alien species of Union concern. OJ L 186, 13.07.2022, p. 10-13.