

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000142/25
to the Commission**

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(15 January 2025)

Subject: Presence of mercury in marine environments

The adoption of the Minamata Convention in October 2013 has helped to bring down new mercury and methylmercury levels in marine environments. However, despite the reduction in mercury emissions, mercury levels in tuna have remained unchanged.

Two major NGOs, Bloom Association and Foodwatch, recently published a report entitled 'Toxic tuna: chronicle of a health scandal' concerning a study in which an independent laboratory was commissioned to analyse 148 tins of tuna sampled from the ten biggest supermarket chains in Italy, Germany, France, England and Spain.

It turns out that 100% of the tins sampled were contaminated with mercury, while 57% had mercury levels that exceeded the EU maximum limit for prey fish. Record levels of mercury (3.9°mg/kg) were found in a Petit Navire tin purchased in a Carrefour in Paris.

EU regulations set different maximum mercury levels for prey (0.3°mg/kg) and predatory (1°mg/kg).

In the light of the above:

1. Is the Commission aware of the above report, of the number and types of tests that have been carried out in Europe on fishery products and of the results thereof?
2. Will the Commission take further steps in line with the Minamata Convention to reduce mercury pollution in the marine environment?

Submitted: 15.1.2025

Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(18 March 2025)

The Commission is aware of the report of Bloom on mercury in canned tuna. As the Commission pointed out in its reply to Written Question E-002835/2024 ⁽¹⁾, Maximum Levels (MLs) for mercury in several fish species were revised based on the most recent occurrence data, which showed that there was no margin to further reduce the ML for tuna.

According to the available official control data, Member States have not identified cases of non-compliance with the maximum level of 1.0 mg/kg for mercury in canned tuna.

The Mercury Regulation ⁽²⁾ mirrors the objective of the Minamata Convention which aims to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury.

By addressing the whole life cycle of mercury from primary mining to its final disposal as waste, the regulation contributes to the reduction of mercury in the marine environment. The revised Regulation ⁽³⁾ strengthens measures to reduce the use of mercury thereby, reducing releases of mercury to water.

The Marine Strategy Framework ⁽⁴⁾ and the Water Framework Directives ⁽⁵⁾ require Member States to achieve good status of their waters. To implement these Directives, Member States are required to monitor and take measures to ensure that the concentrations of contaminants, including mercury, are at levels not giving rise to pollution effects in the marine and coastal environments.

The Commission follows the implementation of these laws closely. The Commission proposed ⁽⁶⁾ in 2022 to tighten the environmental quality standard for mercury in surface waters.

⁽¹⁾ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2024-002835_EN.html

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2017/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on mercury, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1102/2008, OJ L 137, 24.5.2017, p. 1-21.

⁽³⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/revised-mercury-regulation-enters-force-2024-07-30_en

⁽⁴⁾ Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy, OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19-40.

⁽⁵⁾ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1-73.

⁽⁶⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-amending-water-directives_en