

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001184/25
to the Commission
Nicolás González Casares (S&D)
(20 March 2025)**

Subject: International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL Convention)

During a recent clean-up organised by environmental associations in Galicia, more than half of the waste collected at Doniños beach — a Natura 2000-protected site — was sanitary waste. Having confirmed that no incident had occurred at the Ferrol water purification station, this waste most likely came from a discharge of blackwater from a cruise ship or similar vessel.

The MARPOL Convention (Annex IV) allows untreated blackwater to be discharged into the sea as long as this is done at least 12 nautical miles away from the coast. Resolution 28, adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille in 2021 calls for legislation to be updated to stop the pollution of oceans caused by the discharging of wastewater by ships.

In view of the above:

1. What actions has the Commission taken to reinforce international legislation on this issue?
2. Is the Commission pushing for an update to Annex IV to introduce provisions on the keeping of records and measures aimed at confirming the proper functioning of wastewater treatment plants across their entire life cycle, as called for by resolution WCC-2020-Res-028?

Submitted: 20.3.2025

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(6 June 2025)**

The Commission addresses marine pollution through Directive 2008/56/EC ⁽¹⁾ which requires Member States to achieve good environmental status in marine waters, including measures to prevent ship polluting discharges.

To address sewage discharges from the land, Directive 3019/2024 ⁽²⁾ recently strengthened urban wastewater treatment standards, nutrient reduction, and monitoring of emerging pollutants.

International standards under the MARPOL Convention ⁽³⁾, particularly Annex IV on sewage, are implemented in the EU through Directive 2005/35/EC ⁽⁴⁾, recently amended ⁽⁵⁾ to cover sewage, enhanced satellite surveillance, improved information exchange, and strengthened enforcement efforts, particularly in sensitive areas such as Natura 2000 sites.

However, Member States remain responsible for monitoring and penalising illegal discharges from ships. According to MARPOL, it is illegal for a ship to discharge sewage which is un-treated within 12 nautical miles from the nearest land ⁽⁶⁾.

The Commission also supports Member States in discussions at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to improve environmental standards, including on sewage discharges.

The EU endorses efforts to update MARPOL Annex IV ⁽⁷⁾. This revision includes improving the lifetime performance of sewage treatment plants and updating the 2012 Guidelines on effluent standards and performance tests.

Recognising the importance of record-keeping and lifecycle measures for wastewater treatment plants ⁽⁸⁾, the Commission advocates for drafting of guidelines on the implementation of Annex IV for sewage treatment plants and guidance on obtaining data on the quality of treated sewage effluent. However, the adoption of such updates requires agreement within the IMO.

⁽¹⁾ Marine Strategy Framework Directive — Directive 2008/56/EC (OJ L 164 25.6.2008, p. 19) — <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/56/oj/eng>.

⁽²⁾ Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202403019.

⁽³⁾ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.

⁽⁴⁾ Directive 2005/35/EC as regards ship-source pollution and on the introduction of administrative penalties for infringements (OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p.11).

⁽⁵⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/3101 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 amending Directive 2005/35/EC as regards ship-source pollution and on the introduction of administrative penalties for infringements (OJ L, 2024/3101, 16.12.2024).

⁽⁶⁾ This applies to ships *en route* at a speed less than four knots, instantaneously discharging sewage held in holding tanks, which is not comminuted or disinfected.

⁽⁷⁾ International Maritime Organisation. 12th session of the sub-committee on Pollution Prevention and Response. 27-31 January 2025.

⁽⁸⁾ As highlighted by Resolution WCC-2020-Res-028.