

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001265/25
to the Commission
Maria Ohisalo (Verts/ALE)
(26 March 2025)**

Subject: Toxic waste water from chemical tankers released into the Baltic Sea

Chemical tankers are discarding cancer-causing waste water into the Baltic Sea. When chemical tankers' tanks are washed at sea, chemicals such as tall oil, styrene and benzene ⁽¹⁾ are spilled into the sea.

For instance, the company Borealis Polymer ⁽²⁾ admits to releasing chemicals such as benzene into the Baltic Sea when washing its tanks relatively close to coastal settlements near Porvoo, Finland. Benzene can cause cancer, mutations and is toxic to aquatic organisms, including fish.

Despite the high environmental and health risks, this practice remains legal.

1. What action is the Commission taking to ensure that chemical tankers adhere to stricter environmental regulations regarding chemical discharge into the ocean?
2. What other measures is the Commission taking to address the issue of chemicals being released into the ocean?

Submitted: 26.3.2025

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(5 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.

International standards under the MARPOL Convention ⁽²⁾, particularly Annex II on noxious liquid substances, aim at preventing discharges of polluting substances and are implemented in the EU by Directive 2005/35/EC ⁽³⁾.

This directive was recently amended ⁽⁴⁾ to enhance satellite surveillance, improve information exchange, and strengthen enforcement efforts.

Member States are responsible for monitoring and penalising illegal discharges, and the Commission supports these efforts through fostering collaboration between them.

At the International Maritime Organisation, the Commission supports its Member States by coordinating the EU position in discussions to improve tank washing procedures globally and reduce the environmental impact of chemical discharges ⁽⁵⁾ as well as of Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems discharges ⁽⁶⁾.

Also, specifically for the Baltic Sea, the EU was involved in drafting Helcom recommendations ⁽⁷⁾ for port reception facilities where noxious liquid substances are unloaded to receive the tank washings resulting from the application of pre-wash procedures.

¹ <https://johnnurmisensaatio.fi/mita-teemme/hankkeet/kemikaalialushanke/>.

² <https://www.hs.fi/alueet/art-2000011062707.html>.

⁽¹⁾ Marine Strategy Framework Directive — Directive 2008/56/EC (OJ L 164 25.6.2008, p. 19).

⁽²⁾ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.

⁽³⁾ 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).

⁽⁴⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/3101 as regards ship-source pollution (OJ L, 2024/3101, 16.12.2024).

⁽⁵⁾ 12th session of the sub-committee on Pollution Prevention and Response, 27-31 January 2025. Amendments to MARPOL Annex II in order to improve the effectiveness of cargo tank stripping, tank washing operations and prewash procedures for products with a high melting point and/or high viscosity. Experience in Europe with regard to the effectiveness of MARPOL Annex II amendments for products with a high melting point and/or high viscosity (PPR 12/4).

⁽⁶⁾ The International Maritime Organisation approved in 2019, a new item work-stream on the 'Evaluation and harmonisation of rules and guidance on the discharge of liquid effluents from Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems (EGCS also known as scrubbers) into waters, including conditions and areas'. 2026 is the target completion year.

⁽⁷⁾ Helcom Recommendation 10/5, Guidelines for the establishment of adequate reception facilities in ports.

The Commission is pursuing broader measures to address marine pollution⁽⁸⁾ and is planning new initiatives under the upcoming Ocean Pact strengthening *inter alia* the EU's commitment to protecting marine ecosystems⁽⁹⁾. The Commission recently evaluated the directive 2008/56/EC⁽¹⁰⁾, regularly monitors its implementation⁽¹¹⁾ and is considering the need for additional measures to strengthen it.

⁽⁸⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/3019 concerning urban wastewater treatment (OJ L, 2024/3019, 12.12.2024); Directive (EU) 2024/1785 on industrial emissions (OJ L, 2024/1785, 15.7.2024); Directive (EU) 2016/802 relating to a reduction in the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels (OJ L 132, 21.5.2016, p. 58-78).

⁽⁹⁾ Ocean Pact https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14474-The-European-Oceans-Pact_en.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Evaluation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (SWD(2025) 50 final).

⁽¹¹⁾ Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) (COM/2025/3 final).