

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002535/25
to the Commission
Per Clausen (The Left)
(24 June 2025)

Subject: Denmark's 14-year lack of limit values for hazardous substances in the oceans

The Danish Minister for the Environment has admitted ⁽¹⁾ that Denmark has failed to comply with both Danish and EU environmental regulations for 14 years by failing to set limit values for toxic substances (including PCBs and heavy metals) in fish and mussels, and in the seabed. It has therefore been impossible to assess how polluted Denmark's coastal waters have actually been. ⁽²⁾

A memo from 2020 ⁽³⁾ pointed out that this has meant, among other things, that it is not possible to adequately assess the state of the marine environment and comply with the EU's water framework and marine strategy framework directives.

This is despite the fact that Danish officials have been trying to warn successive ministers about the problem since at least 2011.

This is an extremely serious matter that casts an even worse light on the problems that Denmark has had in implementing the water framework directives.

In the light of the foregoing:

1. Does the Commission have an overview of how many breaches of EU law Denmark's practices have resulted in since 2011?
2. How do the revelations concerning the lack of action and the infringement of — among other things — EU regulations over a 14-year period affect the assessment of Denmark's failure to implement the Water Framework Directive?
3. Has the Commission received a plan from Denmark on how the country intends to bring itself into line with EU legislation?

Submitted: 24.6.2025

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(27 August 2025)

In 2021, the Commission launched a horizontal investigation to follow up on its assessment of the 2nd River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) of all Member States. Concerning Denmark, the Commission raised questions about the gaps in the classification of ecological and chemical status.

Denmark confirmed the gaps and indicated that it was in the process of establishing environmental quality standards (EQS) for the remaining priority substances ⁽¹⁾ and river basin specific pollutants ⁽²⁾ in the matrices in which they are monitored.

However, they indicated that this work would not be completed by the end of 2021, the deadline to adopt the 3rd RBMPs, and hence to submit updated classifications during the following RBMP cycle, hence in 2028.

Therefore, the Commission's assessment of the 3rd RBMPs resulted again in a recommendation ⁽³⁾ to 'step up the efforts to meet the requirements set out in the Water Framework Directive ⁽⁴⁾ as regards monitoring, assessment, data management and reporting'.

The Commission is aware that Denmark is in the process of revising its 3rd RBMPs and expects to see in these revised reports already significant progress in tackling the issue.

¹ <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/eksperter-miljoeministeriet-har-i-aarevis-bevidst-brudt-regler-om-forurening-af>

² <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/afsloering-embedsmaend-har-i-14-aar-advaret-om-miljoeministeriet-skjuler-forurening>

³ <https://effektivtlandbrug.landbrugnet.dk/artikler/politik/113567/i-14-aar-har-embedsmaend-forsoeget-at-raabe-politikerne-op-om-havforurening>

⁽¹⁾ di(2-ethylhexyl) Phthalate, benzo(a)pyrene, fluoranthene, hexachlorocyclohexane, nickel and tributyltin.

⁽²⁾ aminomethylphosphonic acid, arsenic, butyl benzyl phthalate, benz(a)anthracene, chrysene, di(2-ethylhexyl) adipate, diisononilphthalate, glyphosate, copper, chrome, polychlorinated biphenyls, phenanthrene, pyrene and zinc.

⁽³⁾ SWD(2025) 34, 4 February, recommendation 6 on page 40.

⁽⁴⁾ 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, as amended by Commission Directive 2014/101/EU of 30 October 2014, OJ L 311, 31.10.2014, p. 32-35.

The Commission intends to raise the issue during the upcoming structured dialogues on the Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive implementation, to take place in 2025 and 2026.
