

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002819/25
to the Commission
Michalis Hadjipantela (PPE)
(10 July 2025)

Subject: Vessel exhaust testing

The EU is a signatory to the International Maritime Organisation's Marpol Annex VI regulations on exhaust emissions. Through its Sulfur Directive ⁽¹⁾, the Commission is committed to reducing the harmful effects caused by sulfur dioxide emissions and requires Member States to submit their compliance reports and testing results each year. It has focused on the sulfur content of liquid fuels, taking on 'good faith' the use of those fuels by marine traffic within the Emission Control Zone. It has further relied on scrubber exhaust technology used by vessels to reach the control zone targets. In both instances, reliance is being placed on the vessel operator to use those scrubbers and/or fuels with very limited ability to independently verify such use. Furthermore, the high-cost fuel testing falls on the Member States who, due to the cost, cannot test a large number of vessels and many vessels not meeting the targets are not being identified.

1. Why is the Commission not considering alternative options that would test each vessel effectively, such as direct live testing of maritime vessel exhaust emissions with approved reporting devices?
2. How is it compensating for the maritime vessels that are not being tested and are violating the targets?

Submitted: 10.7.2025

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

1. The Commission acknowledges the importance of effectively enforcing Directive (EU) 2016/802 on the sulphur content of marine fuels ⁽¹⁾, including through the use of real-time emission monitoring systems. To that end, Commission Decision (EU) 2015/253 ⁽²⁾ sets about 10 000 inspection obligations per year across the EU. These include fuel-based inspections, i.e. documentation checks, testing of fuel used onboard (about 1 500 per year) or sold by fuel suppliers. On emission testing, the decision provides for the possibility for Member States to reduce fuel testing if they use technologies such as fixed stations, drones or planes. Currently, the Commission has no plans to mandate approved reporting devices but is exploring digital alternatives as explained below.
2. The Commission assesses compliance with current requirements with the technical assistance of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) ⁽³⁾. Data collected in the THETIS portal ⁽⁴⁾ on the EU inspections indicate a high level of compliance (above 90% ⁽⁵⁾) with no clear-cut indication of major infringements on which the Commission, as guardian of the Treaty, should act. Moreover, according to the European Maritime Transport Environmental report ⁽⁶⁾, sulphur emissions in the EU have dropped by 70% since 2014. Nevertheless, in view of improving cost-effectiveness, the Commission continues to work with the Member States and EMSA, to develop a centralised targeting system to prioritise inspections based on risk which would reduce fuel testing.

¹ Directive (EU) 2016/802 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 relating to a reduction in the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels (codification), ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/802/oj>.

⁽¹⁾ Directive (EU) 2016/802 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 relating to a reduction in the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels (codification), OJ L 132, 21.5.2016, pp. 58-78.

⁽²⁾ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2015/253 of 16 February 2015 laying down the rules concerning the sampling and reporting under Council Directive 1999/32/EC as regards the sulphur content of marine fuels, OJ L 41, 17.2.2015, pp. 55-59.

⁽³⁾ <https://emsa.europa.eu/>.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://portal.emsa.europa.eu/web/thetis-eu>.

⁽⁵⁾ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on implementation and compliance with the sulphur standards for marine fuels set out in Directive (EU) 2016/802 relating to a reduction in the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels, COM/2018/188 final.

⁽⁶⁾ <https://emsa.europa.eu/emter-2025/full-report.html>.