

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000906/26
to the Commission
Rasmus Nordqvist (Verts/ALE)
(4 March 2026)**

Subject: Enforcement of EPR for fishing gear and remediation of legacy waste

In early 2026, a 14-metre sperm whale washed ashore at Ålholm, Denmark, having died of starvation caused by 12 kg of plastic fishing nets. This tragedy highlights the threat posed by the estimated 50 000 ‘ghost nets’ — fishing nets abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded in oceans, lakes and rivers — in Danish waters. Under Directive (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes for plastic fishing gear became mandatory on 1 January 2025.

While official data reporting is not due until 2027, this incident demonstrates that current enforcement is failing to prevent lethal plastic waste from entering the sea.

1. How is the Commission monitoring the Member States’ enforcement of EPR obligations to ensure producers are held financially liable for the lifecycle of their products and take appropriate measures for their end-of-life management, and what specific actions will the Commission take to ensure ‘legacy gear’ — gear abandoned before 2025 — is actively retrieved, beyond EPR obligations?
2. What measures will the Commission take to ensure EPR schemes include mandatory financial contributions towards proactively retrieving ‘ghost gear’?
3. Does the Commission plan to introduce harmonised EU standards for digital gear marking and GPS tracking to ensure accountability for lost equipment?

Submitted: 4.3.2026

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(21 May 2026)**

The Commission monitors Member States’ transposition of the Single-Use Plastic Directive (SUPD) ⁽¹⁾, including on extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, and takes appropriate action. Enforcement of EPR under the SUPD lies with Member States. The SUPD does not set requirements for ‘legacy gear’.

The Commission’s evaluation of the SUPD, due by 3 July 2027, will assess, *inter alia*, EPR schemes for fishing gear containing plastic and their impact on collection rates, and also if EU policies outside of the SUPD (e.g., the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) ⁽²⁾, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) ⁽³⁾ and the Port Reception Facilities ⁽⁴⁾) provide incentives for the collection of waste fishing gear containing plastic.

The Commission has no plans to mandate financial contributions for proactively retrieving ‘ghost gear’. The EU does address marine litter resulting from the fisheries sector through targeted actions funded by the EMFF and EMFAF, as shown by a recent report ⁽⁵⁾.

The EU fisheries control framework does not mandate digital marking/GPS tracking of fishing gear, and the Commission has no current plans to establish such requirements. Vessel-based obligations, including specific requirements to report and, if feasible, retrieve lost gear, and the obligation to carry retrieval equipment ensure control and traceability. Vessels must report gear info at departure, during fishing, and upon return to port.

Fishing gear must be visibly marked for inspection. Digital solutions can complement visible gear marking but are not required. Non-compliance, especially concerning gear marking and illegal disposal, can lead to infringement proceedings.

⁽¹⁾ Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, OJ L 155, 12.6.2019, p. 1-19.

⁽²⁾ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-investment/european-maritime-and-fisheries-fund-emff_en.

⁽³⁾ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-investment/emfaf_en.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/sustainable-ports/port-reception-facilities.html>.

⁽⁵⁾ Report on marine litter actions funded under the EMFF and EMFAF — Oceans and fisheries (2026), https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/publications/report-marine-litter-actions-funded-under-emff-and-emfaf_en.