Although he is on a low income and unable to pay this bill, the water company has pursued Mr Cole through the courts to reclaim its money.

The Water Industry Act of 1999 has changed this situation, and enables water companies to more accurately tailor their bills to reflect the real water consumption of their customers. However, this legislation is not retrospective. As a result, Mr Cole’s previous iniquitous situation has been ‘recognised’, but unfortunately it will not alter the fact that he still is confronted with a bill of £700 which the Courts in England say he is legally obliged to pay.

Would the Council of Ministers consider intervening in national issues to help low-income groups who are penalised in this way?

Reply
(6 December 2001)

The Council regrets to inform the Honourable Member, that it is not within its powers to interfere directly in domestic matters such as water pricing or, indeed, local taxation.

The Council would like to recall, however, that it devotes considerable effort at present to the questions of combating poverty and social exclusion.

The Council’s work is being prepared and coordinated, as its first priority, by the Social Protection Committee, set up by the Council in June 2000, and operating within the framework of the new open method of coordination, as defined by the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. Subsequent European Councils have given additional emphasis to these activities.

This work is being pursued intensively and is covering a wide range of issues, given the very multidimensional character of poverty and social exclusion. Currently the Committee, together with the Commission, is preparing a joint Commission/Council report based on the National Action Plans on social inclusion. It is also working on a set of indicators, to enhance future cooperation and development. The results of these two activities are to be submitted to the Laeken European Council in December 2001.

Moreover, the Council and the European Parliament have just reached agreement on a draft Decision establishing a five-year programme (2002-2006) of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States in combating social exclusion, with a budget of €75 million. The objectives of the Programme are the improvement of the understanding of the phenomena of social exclusion and poverty, the organising of exchanges of experience on policies followed and the promotion of mutual learning, as well as the development of the capacity of operators to address social exclusion and poverty effectively.

It has to be stressed that the programme to combat social exclusion complements actions funded by the European Social Fund and under the ‘Equal’ initiative to combat poverty.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2367/01
by Mark Watts (PSE) to the Commission
(6 August 2001)

Subject: Animal transport

In June the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution calling on the Commission to submit to the Council: (a) suitable proposals to (i) achieve effective implementation and strict enforcement of existing legislation, (ii) improve the protection and welfare of animals as well a preventing the occurrence and spread of infectious animal diseases, and (b) an animal health and welfare report on (i) issues arising from the transport of live animals, also taking into account the public interest to prevent the spread of infectious
animal diseases, and (ii) economic consequences for the European Union generally or for regions thereof of any changes proposed.

What proposals does the Commission intend to submit to the Council in response to the resolution, and what timetable does the Commission envisage?

**Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission**

(14 September 2001)

The protection of animals during transport is a priority for the Commission who fully shares the concerns expressed in the resolution adopted in June 2001 by the Council of Ministers, to which the Honourable Member refers.

In January 2001 a Commission report (1) on this issue was discussed at the Council of Ministers. On this occasion the Member States approved and supported the conclusions of the Commission. The Commission report concludes that Member States have had obvious difficulties in fully applying Community legislation in this field. The report also suggests that measures to encourage the slaughter of animals closer to the places where they are raised also merits examination. The Commission believes that stricter rules are essential for the improvement of the current situation and has already taken several initiatives including the presentation of two legislative proposals in this domain. The first proposal (2) for a Council Regulation concerning ventilation systems of road vehicles used for journeys exceeding eight hours, aims to improve the standards of the vehicles including requirements for a minimum ventilation rate and mandatory systems for monitoring the temperature inside the lorries. The second proposal (3) aims to obtain a mandate from the Council to negotiate the participation of the Community in the revised European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport.

An additional proposal amending Council Directive 91/628/EEC of 19 November 1991 on the protection of animals during transport and amending Directives 90/425/EEC and 91/496/EEC (4) is under preparation aiming at introducing additional higher standards for animal transport, and at facilitating the administrative procedures to allow better enforcement and easier persecution of those responsible for the infringements. Furthermore following the outcome of a new opinion of the Scientific Committee on Animal Welfare, expected for the end of 2001, a redefinition of travelling times and loading densities may be proposed taking into account new scientific evidences.

In the preparation of any proposal introducing new animal welfare standards including the ones related to the protection during transport, the respect of animal health and public health is a priority for the Commission, in particular the prevention of the spreading of any animal disease.


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(2002/C 81 E/189)  
**WRITTEN QUESTION P-2368/01**

by Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(2 August 2001)

**Subject:** High-speed railway in Tuscany and sites of Community importance

Badia di Moscheta (Alto Mugello), a hilly area famed for its beauty and rich in historical associations in the vicinity of Florence, is seriously threatened by the building work on the TAV SpA high-speed railway project and especially the 73 kms of tunnelling currently under construction between Florence and Bologna. The work is causing a loss of significant volumes of quality water resources, subsidence (1) and