Since 1 January 1997 when a separate fleet segment for prawn boats was created in the MAGP IV for the Netherlands, this segment has expanded predominantly by transfer of existing vessels from the 221 kW Eurocutter segment.

The Dutch authorities have systematically transferred Eurocutter vessels abandoning fishing for species under quota to the prawn fleet segment. Hence the apparent expansion of the prawn fleet segment, to which only four newly built vessels (total capacity roughly 200 GT) have been added since 1987.

The combined capacity of the two segments has been stable over the period 1997-02 owing precisely to the granting of scrapping premiums for cutter segment vessels offered for withdrawal.

In response to the Honourable Member’s specific questions:

1. The Commission considers that reduction of surplus prawn-fishing capacity can be ensured by the Netherlands’ recent adoption of an entry exit ratio of 1:1.35 and of an exit plan recently notified to the Commission and under examination.

2. The Netherlands has granted no construction or fleet modernisation aid during MAGP IV. The ‘Prawner 2000’ project was abandoned because failure to comply with the segment objective meant that public aid could not be given. Under the new policy new construction has no bearing on establishment of the reference levels, which depend only on the objectives previously set for the MAGP IVs.

3. The Commission can rule out, except as an infringement of the Community rules, the likelihood of direct use of scrapping aid for vessel construction, since all aid for withdrawal involves withdrawal of the fishing licence so that the corresponding capacity cannot be used.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2433/02

by Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(26 August 2002)

Subject: Management of North Sea fish stocks

How can the Commission justify its proposals to open the North Sea for a ‘free for all’ when there is clearly insufficient scientific evidence to demonstrate that the survival of key stocks will be protected?

Will the Commission rethink its potentially devastating proposal under the CFP reforms that the North Sea will only be governed by a TACs and quotas regime, which in the light of its written answer P-1902/02 (1), has been based on a lack of scientific advice and ‘insufficient information’?

The Commission has admitted that:

1. Very little is known about the abundance and status of non-quota species in the North Sea;

2. Many non-quota species would ‘almost certainly’ incur by-catches of species subject to quotas, many of which are already fully utilised and over-fished, some with the need for recovery measures;

3. There is insufficient information to establish the commercial value of non-quota species.
In light of the Commission’s own admissions, can the Commission explain why it is proposing a management regime for the North Sea which could result in the decimation of fish stocks which have already severely declined, with a potentially devastating impact on fisheries-dependent communities located on the North Sea?

(1) OJC 28 E, 6.2.2003, p. 154.

Answer given by Mr. Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(1 October 2002)

In its reply to written question P-1902/02 by the Honourable Member (1), the Commission referred to species not subject to catch limitations in the North Sea. However, it should be recalled that all the most commercially important species in the North Sea are subject to total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas. Therefore any comments about non-quota species should be regarded against the background of the existing conservation measures for the main stocks.

In the light of the TACs and quotas and technical measures already applicable for the main species in the North Sea there is certainly no reason to consider Community policy as being a ‘free-for-all’. On the contrary, Community policy has considerably tightened up conservation of these species over years, following the Commission’s initiative.

Any remark concerning non-quota species in the North Sea should be put in perspective. Non-quota species can hardly justify directed fisheries, and the Commission is not aware of significant fisheries targeting non-quota species in the North Sea beyond 12 miles. Therefore it is clear for the Commission that the vast majority, if not all the fishing activity in the North Sea is indeed subject to the existing conservation measures. The Commission, in any case, is fully prepared (as shown with recent initiatives such as the cod and hake recovery plan) to do everything necessary to improve conservation of stocks in all Community regions, including the introduction of fishing effort limitations alongside catch limits and technical rules for fishing.

The Commission has also indicated, in the ‘Roadmap’ to the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, that it intends to bring as many species as possible under Community legislation in the North Sea, as the necessary scientific basis becomes available.

(1) OJC 28 E, 6.2.2003, p. 154.

Subject: Report by the Contraloría de la República on the Plan Colombia

In view of the fact that the Contraloría General de la República Colombiana (Office of the Comptroller General of Colombia) has stated in its third assessment report on the Plan Colombia that:

- the anti-drugs Plan Colombia contains administrative irregularities;
- eradication by force has failed to strike a blow at drug traffickers, so much so that today 163,000 hectares are still under illegal cultivation across the country and cultivation of the crop has outstripped its destruction, since 152,000 hectares were burned between 2000 and 2002, and despite this coca is now being grown in areas previously dedicated to coffee production;
- the Plan Colombia is unsatisfactory from an environmental standpoint;

(2003/C 92 E/224) WRITTEN QUESTION E-2442/02

by Marco Cappato (NI) to the Council

(28 August 2002)