2. Does the Commission accept that the monetary value of the pensions now being received by farmers who joined in 1994 has been seriously eroded and that the absence of indexation is causing a reluctance in many older farmers to hand over the reins to a younger, more productive and better educated generation on the land?

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

(18 February 2003)

Neither the superseded Council Regulation (EEC) No 2079/92 (1) nor the legislation now in force, namely Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 (2), prohibit the use of indexation in the early retirement scheme. If a Member State wishes to introduce indexation into its rural development programme in order to guarantee recipients the same income in real terms throughout the support period it may do so provided that the maximum aid levels set in the Regulation are respected.

It must be noted that with introduction of the new Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 the early retirement scheme became much more financially attractive.

The maximum amount that Member States can grant per recipient has been greatly increased by comparison with the old scheme (from EUR10 000 to EUR15 000 per transferor per year). The total period during which compensation can be paid was raised from 10 to 15 years and the transferor can receive it up to the age of 75 years (70 years under the old legislation). Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 also allows the annual ceiling to be doubled. The overall ceiling per transferor set at EUR150 000 cannot however be altered.

The early retirement scheme, like the other rural development measures, will be reviewed in preparation for the post-2006 period.

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(2003/C 161 E/157) **WRITTEN QUESTION E-3835/02**

by Isidoro Sánchez García (ELDR) to the Commission

(9 January 2003)

**Subject:** Procedure for designation of protected areas (ZEPAs)

The biodiversity which characterises the Canary Islands (which have the status of one of the EU’s most remote regions) has consistently been recognised by the international scientific community: the islands are living museums of relictic species which once occupied the face of the earth and survived the Tertiary ice age, which so deeply affected the planet’s sea and land ecosystems.

Numerous unique habitats in the Canary Islands have, in recognition of their importance for the study of nature, been declared Sites of Community Interest (SCIs) and incorporated in the Natura 2000 network, following a procedure based, in the view of the experts, on the provision of high-quality information and strict rules for declaration.

Nonetheless, certain scientists are of the opinion that those same criteria — strict rules and high-quality information — have been lacking in the procedure for the designation of the protected areas known as ZEPAs (special bird protection zones).

Would it not be desirable for the Commission, when designating ZEPAs, to make use of the same criteria of properly organised information, and the same procedure, as are employed for SCIs?
Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(6 February 2003)

The Honourable Member has expressed his concern regarding the system and the criteria that the Commission uses for special protection area (SPA) designation.

According to provisions of Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds (1) a site is classified as a special protection area for conservation of the birds, SPA, by Member States and not by the Commission.

The Birds Directive states that Member States shall classify in particular the most suitable territories in number and size as special protected areas for the conservation of birds, taking into account their protection requirements in the geographical sea and land area where the Directive applies.

In relation to the criteria for classifying an area as a SPA, the Birds Directive does not specify very detailed criteria for the identification of the sites. The approach for SPAs cannot therefore be the same as for the Habitats Directive (2) where the text has included a detailed list of eligibility criteria. Nevertheless, the Birds Directive states the obligation to choose the most suitable areas. Similar measures must be taken for regularly migratory species not listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. Finally Member States shall pay particular attention to the protection of wetlands and particularly to wetlands of international importance.

(1) OJL103, 25.4.1979.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3841/02
by Walter Veltroni (PSE) to the Commission

(9 January 2003)

Subject: VAT on compact discs

The market in audiovisual and multi-media products has always been subject to a high rate of taxation.

This sets off a chain reaction which, because of high prices, discourages people from buying recordings, especially of music. The low demand affects royalties, discourages creativity and has a negative impact on the potential of a market which would otherwise be much more vibrant and profitable, since the number of copies sold would increase.

This situation induces many potential purchasers to buy goods obtained by unlawful means.

The market in pirate discs and the availability of music via the Internet, made possible by ‘peer-to-peer’ systems, further discourage sales by offering an alternative product, often of adequate quality, to most potential purchasers of music CD’s. In addition, illicit and alternative markets are flourishing, often using sales networks operated by illegal immigrants.

In view of the frequent requests it receives to apply a lower rate of taxation to multi-media such a CD’s, CD-ROMs and DVD’s and to activities in the cultural and audiovisual sphere in the broad sense, does the Commission intend, in the context of the forthcoming revision of Directive 77/388/EEC (3) on VAT, to commit itself to proposing a change in the provisions of the Directive with a view to decisively lowering the rate of taxation on cultural goods and services and including CD’s in Annex H (which already covers other ‘cultural products’ such as books), in order to promote the full enjoyment of ‘means of disseminating culture’ throughout Europe and discourage the unlawful parallel market?