Firstly, under the rules in force, the Spanish government may use certain sums from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund already allocated to Spain for 2000-2006 to combat the consequences of the disaster. The Commission can inform the Honourable Member that the Spanish authorities have already notified their wish to finance some cleaning up work from measure 3.3 ('Coastal environmental measures') of the operational programme for Galicia 2000-2006, which has assistance from the ERDF of EUR 64 516 472.

Secondly, to help alleviate the consequences of the accident for the fisheries sector, the Commission proposed to the Council certain modifications to the existing legal framework for structural interventions in the fishing sector to support the fishing fleet and the aquaculture sector in that area in order to provide financial aid.

As a result of this proposal, the Council adopted on 20 December 2002 Regulation (EC) No 2372/2002 instituting specific measures to compensate the Spanish fisheries, shellfish industry and aquaculture affected by the oil spills from the Prestige (1).

A total Community allocation of EUR 30 million is foreseen for the following specific measures:

(a) compensation to persons and owners of enterprises for the temporary cessation of their activities;
(b) measures to encourage the replacement of fishing gear, of other auxiliary equipments and the repair of the affected boats and the replacement of damaged elements;
(c) measures to encourage the cleaning, the repairing and the reconstruction of shellfish and aquaculture sites;
(d) measures to compensate for the replacement of shellfish stocks.

Thirdly, the Commission is also looking at other sources of finance, such as the Union Solidarity Fund, which was, however, set up primarily to assist in the event of natural disasters, not only environmental ones, and for which the legislator laid down restrictive eligibility criteria. The Commission is currently considering the application made by the Spanish authorities on 14 January 2003 in terms of the criteria laid down by Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund. Possible aid from the Solidarity Fund could contribute mainly to the cleaning of beaches. These financial resources would be over and above other assistance previously decided on.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-0009/03
by Paulo Casaca (PSE) to the Commission

(16 January 2003)

Subject: Lack of objectivity in the Commission’s study on fish-farming

In Written Question E-2675/02 (1) I said ‘the industrial farming of carnivorous fish is today the principal threat to the sustainable development of fisheries’, a view based on a number of studies published by scientific journals such as ‘Nature’ and the opinions of many environmental organisations, which can easily be found on the Internet and which, apparently, only the Commission does not know about.

To my amazement, instead of receiving an answer to my questions, I was confronted with a crude distortion of my statements, from which the specific reference to carnivorous fish — which was the whole point of the question — was omitted.

Furthermore, the Commission has shown itself incapable of acting responsibly, arguing that there is no detailed evidence of very high levels of PCBs in salmon in order to justify its inaction, despite the fact that this information is available to everybody and I myself mentioned some of the best-known sources.
In effect, the Commission managed the rare achievement of producing a 28-page document on fish-farming without making a single substantial reference to the problems caused to sustainable fisheries by the industrial farming of carnivorous fish.

Does the Commission not consider it its duty to take account of the precautionary principle and weigh up the facts in a balanced and objective manner when proposing policy strategies, instead of advocating formulae which may jeopardise the sustainability of fisheries? Has the Commission considered what responsibility it is assuming by adopting this kind of attitude?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(25 February 2003)

In reply to the concern expressed by the Honourable Member about the pressure on wild fish stocks to produce fishmeal for carnivorous fish farming, the Commission observes that in its answer to the Honourable Member’s Written Question E-2675/02 the Commission mentioned the Community strategy for sustainable development of European aquaculture (1) and other specific action to guarantee the sustainability of both aquaculture and the fisheries that support the farming industry. It should be noted that European aquaculture is essentially based on carnivorous species (trout, salmon, seabass, seabream, turbot, sturgeon), so the strategy applies essentially, although not exclusively, to this type of aquaculture.

The Commission is conscious of the extent to which European aquaculture may put pressure on the marine ecosystem (in particular, on wild species and habitats) and has addressed this concern in the strategy proposed and in its wider policy on fisheries management. On the basis of the scientific evidence available, the Commission is not in a position, however, to support the view that aquaculture constitutes the major threat to the sustainable development of fisheries, as the Honourable Member suggests.

Aquaculture production of carnivorous fish has grown steadily, while annual world fishmeal production has remained nearly constant at 6-7 million tons over the past 15 years, except for a decline during the 1998 El Niño period. This was possible because as aquaculture has grown, it has diverted a growing portion of the fishmeal supply from its traditional use in feed for land animals. The proportion of fishmeal used by aquaculture has passed from 10% in 1988 to 35% in 1998.

As duly pointed out by the Commission Communication on fish farming (2) the intensification of freshwater fish aquaculture in Asia may absorb by the end of this decade as much as 70-80 percent of world fish oil production and at least 50 percent of fishmeal production, creating problems of supply. This resource being limited, it is extremely important to continue the research effort to find substitute protein sources in the fish feed formulation.

The Commission considers that research to find alternative protein sources for fish feed should be given top priority, in order to allow a further development of carnivorous fish farming and, at the same time, ensure the sustainability of industrial fisheries.

Concerning the levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in salmon, the Commission is conscious of the need to limit human exposure to PCBs from food. The Commission has adopted a comprehensive approach with regard to dioxins, furans and PCBs in food and feed. Legally binding maximum levels for dioxins and furans are in application in feed and food, including fish and fishery products, since 1 July 2002. These maximum levels will be reviewed by 31 December 2004 with a view to inclusion of dioxin-like PCBs in the levels to be set. As regards non-dioxin-like PCBs a risk assessment is currently undertaken, taking into account the most recent toxicological information. Given the very complex and comprehensive
nature of the risk assessment, the Commission is co-operating closely with other international official organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) to perform this assessment. The monitoring on the presence of non-toxin like PCBs in feed and food, including fish and fishery products, is continuously ongoing and the obtained data are made available for the risk assessment. These data will further serve to determine the most appropriate Community measures to be taken to reduce the presence of PCBs in feed and food.


(2003/C161E/174) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0024/03

by Yves Piétrasanta (Verts/ALE), Catherine Guy-Quint (PSE), Harlem Désir (PSE), Renzo Imbeni (PSE), Gérard Onesta (Verts/ALE), Francis Wurtz (GUE/NGL), Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), Alonso Puerta (GUE/NGL), Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca (PPE-DE), Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Verts/ALE), Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE), Giuseppe Di Lello Finuoli (GUE/NGL), Pedro Marset Campos (GUE/NGL), Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE), Didier Rod (Verts/ALE), Danielle Auroi (Verts/ALE), Paul Lannoye (Verts/ALE), Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), Caroline Jackson (PPE-DE), Struan Stevenson (PPE-DE), Theodorou Bouwman (Verts/ALE), Armando Cossutta (GUE/NGL), Nuala Ahern (Verts/ALE), Jan Wiersma (PSE) and Robert Goodwill (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(20 January 2003)

Subject: EU aid and intervention for the victims of Chernobyl

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 was the most serious nuclear accident ever to have occurred in peacetime, leaving a terrifying and devastating radioactive legacy that will continue to be felt for many centuries to come, mainly in the European states of Ukraine and, above all, Belarus, countries already fragile as a result of undergoing abrupt economic, social and political transition.

As well as the great many victims directly affected by radiation among the local inhabitants and the 600,000 ‘liquidators’ who took part in the clean-up operation at the site of this tragedy of the industrial age, there are also those who have been forced to stay in the area or return there, due to economic constraints or political obscurantism.

Invisible but ever-present, caesium-137 and strontium-90, radionuclides with a half-life of around 30 years, have caused long-term damage to 5% of Ukrainian and 23% of Belarusian soil, reducing the local populations to a state of subsistence living. At present, the situation is characterised by pandemics of thyroid cancer, leukaemia, congenital deformities, and an unprecedented ecological genocide far outstripping any individual state’s budgetary, sanitary and medical capacities, let alone those of successor states to the Soviet Union. The scientific community predicts that, in terms of ecological fallout in the ecosystem and pathological after-effects, the worst is yet to come for the ‘Chernobyl generations’.

One scientist, Professor V. B. Nesterenko (1), director of the independent Belarusian Institute of Radiation Safety ‘Belrad’, is conducting pioneering research into nuclear pathologies, devoting all his efforts and the meagre resources available to the Institute to developing medical follow-up and treatments for the people of the affected region, in the face of the numerous difficulties and constraints prevalent in Belarus.

Confronted with this human drama and the challenge of reconciling needs with resources, does the Commission recognise that the political situation in Belarus can under no circumstances justify a withdrawal or even a disengagement from the Union’s duty to provide humanitarian and medical assistance for this European people, but rather that it calls for a redoubling of efforts and presence to help this martyred people and its independent medical personnel and scientists?

What support does the Commission intend to give the Belrad Institute and its director, Professor Nesterenko, following President Romano Prodi’s declaration of 8 April 2002 (2)?