



Subject: Complaint about the environmental disaster of plastic pellet spill on the Galician coast and the need for urgent action.

25 January 2024

Dear President of the European Commission, Mrs. von der Leyen,
Dear President of the European Parliament, Mrs. Metsola,
Dear President of the European Council, Mr. Michel,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, collectively express our deep concern regarding the unfolding environmental catastrophe on the Galician coast, caused by the arrival of millions of plastic pellets.

According to the current information, more than a thousand bags (about 26 tons) of these plastic pellets, each less than five millimeters in size, would have fallen into the sea from the ship "Toconao," a Liberian flag of convenience vessel, on **December 8**, approximately 80 kilometers west of Viana do Castelo (Portugal). The first bags of plastic pellets and scattered pellets began to arrive on the Galician coastline, including places like Ribeira and Muros (A Coruña), on **December 13**. Despite warnings from environmental groups, an incessant influx of these microplastics continues to reach Galician beaches daily, spreading along the coastline from north to south. This calamity poses a severe threat not only to the Galician coast but now affects the entire Cantabrian coast and may extend to Portugal and France. This vulnerable coastal region, which endured significant repercussions from the *Prestige* disaster in 2002, faces an imminent and widespread ecological crisis. Regrettably, **no effective actions have been taken by the Galician government thus far.**

The Galician government's **request for help from the Spanish government was only activated on January 9, one month after the accident**, and is limited to a request for assistance at sea, refusing to obtain more means in cleaning up the coast. Moreover, the **lack of timely information dissemination and transparency** from the Galician Government regarding this environmental disaster is particularly distressing. From the time of the incident on December 8 until the first spills reached the Galician coast, the Anti-Pollution Plan mandated by European regulations (presently under review) post the *Prestige* disaster was not activated. The delayed response has been detrimental, resulting in the uncontrolled dispersion of pellets along the affected coast. One month after the spill, **there is still no allocation of enough public resources for pollution control and the**

cleanup of affected areas. Municipalities are left to grapple with the overwhelming task of cleaning on their own, further exacerbating the crisis.

On the other hand, this incident involving a convenience-flagged vessel raises questions about the regulation and supervision of **maritime transport activities currently under review.** The choice of **convenience flags** is often associated with less stringent practices and lax safety controls, potentially contributing to the severity of this environmental disaster.

Moreover, this disaster shows that **maritime pollution goes far beyond the scope of International Maritime Organization's (IMO) MARPOL 73/78 Convention and the Directive on ship-source pollution that is currently under review in the framework of the EU's maritime safety package revision.**

In light of these circumstances, **we, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament,**

- **urgently request the European Parliament and the European Commission to pressure the relevant authorities to promptly implement a comprehensive, effective and urgent anti-pollution plan.** This plan should encompass an immediate assessment of the environmental impact, the cleanup and mitigation of pellets on the coast, a long-term environmental impact assessment, and the implementation of preventive measures to avert future pollution disasters. Additionally, we urge the Commission to conduct an **socioeconomic assessment** of the environmental consequences and consider **urgent and necessary aid** to alleviate the effects of pollution caused by these pellets.
- **urgently call for an ambitious EU's maritime safety package revision,** currently in negotiations, and the urgent **review of the IMO MARPOL 73/78 Convention,** that **should include pollution from microplastics** originating from containers, as well as the immediate designation of the **Fisterra Corridor as a highly sensitive area for the IMO.** Such actions will establish stricter standards and ensure greater accountability for vessel operators and maritime traffic control, ultimately contributing to the long-term protection of our marine environment.
- **urge the European Parliament and the Council to adopt in this term the new proposal for a Regulation on preventing pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution,** that should include **pollution from maritime transport.**

Yours sincerely,

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