

Dear Dr Lucas,

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2003 on the subject of cetacean incidental bycatch in fisheries.

I am fully aware of the problem you have raised, and particularly about the numerous strandings of dead dolphins in early winter in the South West of England. Several written and oral questions have been submitted to the Commission on this issue and Members of the European Parliament also wrote directly to me to express similar concerns and requests.

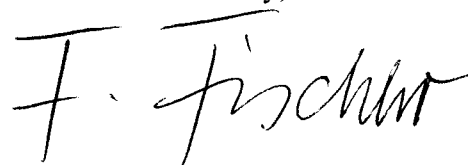
The Commission is convinced that additional Community measures are needed to increase conservation of small cetaceans, in a consistent and co-operative manner at Community level.

In order to have a good scientific and technical basis for its proposals, the Commission asked the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to provide information and advice on a number of issues. These issues include an overview of fisheries that have a significant impact on small cetaceans, an assessment of the risks created by fisheries on identified populations and finally, advice on possible remedial action to reduce the impact of fishing. The Commission is at present examining the above-mentioned scientific advice and has engaged in a wide consultation with stakeholders on a number of measures that could be part of a Commission proposal, including restrictions on some fisheries or fishing gear, the use of acoustic deterrent devices and the need for compulsory on board observers for given fisheries.

My services are continuing the preparation of proposals to address bycatch of cetaceans in fisheries. These measures will probably take the form of a proposal for a Council Regulation, which I expect could become available by mid 2003.

However, as the final decision and adoption of such Community legislation rests with the Council of Ministers, after consultation of the European Parliament, I am not in a position to commit myself on any calendar for such measures being in place. However, I have already personally insisted, during recent talks with some Fisheries Ministers, on the need to take action at national level for some fisheries, without waiting for additional legislation to be adopted at Community level.

Yours sincerely,



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