

## Commission could launch an infringement procedure against Netherlands on electric fishing

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The Legal Service of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) has proposed the opening of an infringement procedure against the Netherlands, due to the excessive number of licences to fish with electric trawls, confirmed several sources on Tuesday 5 February.

It will be up to the European Commission to decide, at a forthcoming meeting of the College of Commissioners, whether or not to launch this infringement procedure by sending a letter of formal notice to the Netherlands.

This procedure "*should be decided as soon as possible, as it would bring clarity to the negotiations*" between EU institutions on technical measures, Mathieu Colléter, Head of Science and Inter-institutional Relations at *Bloom*, told EUROPE.

The subject of electric fishing is a major issue that divides Member States and EU institutions. In January 2018, the European Parliament voted with a large majority in favour of a total ban on electric fishing (*see EUROPE 11940*).

**70 licenses too many.** Dutch industrialists have 84 licences (derogations) to conduct electric fishing in the southern part of the North Sea, compared to the 14 authorised under the current regulation (only 5% of beam trawlers in the North Sea).

As part of the inter-institutional negotiations on technical fisheries measures, negotiators from European Parliament and the Council of the European Union are discussing a transitional period to end the derogations on electric fishing.

The Council would have proposed a three-year period, unacceptable to the NGO *Bloom*, which is campaigning for the derogation to end by 31 July 2019.

The EU institutions would like to complete the file on technical measures before the European elections in May 2019. The Romanian Presidency of the Council has not yet announced the holding of a new trilogue on the subject.

Electric fishing has been reported by some NGOs to have negative effects on juveniles and eggs. *Bloom* also denounces the illegality of public aid granted to industrial ships.