

# Documents reveal Dutch Government fraud in relation to Electric-Pulse Fishing

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Dutch newspaper NOS believes it has uncovered documents linking their government to fraud in relation to electric-pulse fishing

***A Dutch journalist has uncovered what is reported to be years of organised fraud committed by the government of the Netherlands regarding electric-pulse fishing, and his investigation embroils the European Commission in the controversy.***

Parisian based non-governmental organisation BLOOM welcomed the news and said that it confirms what they have been voicing for many years now. They write:

*Since 2017, BLOOM has rung the alarm bell on the multiple frauds committed by the Netherlands with regards to electric fishing, the NGO has filed several complaints with the European Commission against derogations illegally issued to the Dutch fleet.*

*An exclusive investigation by Dutch newspaper NOS, which gained access to internal documents, confirms our revelations. It explains that the Dutch state lied and cheated to obtain licences in a fraudulent manner, without any reaction from the European Commission.*

### ***ORCHESTRATED FRAUD: COVER-UPS AND LIES BY THE DUTCH STATE***

*These revelations came as a colossal thunderbolt on the eve of the full and definitive ban on electric fishing in Europe. After gaining access to internal documents from the Dutch administration, investigative journalist Thomas Spekschoor reveals in his investigation the manipulations of the Netherlands to obtain illegal licences. The Dutch had indeed managed to equip at least 84 trawlers for electric fishing instead of the fifteen or so authorised by European regulations.*

*The journalist summarizes his revelations as follows: "The published part of the documents shows for the first time in black and white how the ministry aimed to mislead Brussels and other EU countries in order to obtain as many electric fishing licences as possible. Dutch officials informed each other by email that their methods were not legal and 'dubious', but were instructed to hide this from the European Commission and the Ministry's political level."*

*Lies and falsified figures were deliberately concealed from the European Commission and other member states by the Netherlands. The article mentions that a Dutch official (without naming him or her) wrote: "It is important that these issues are treated with the least attention possible. [...] It is not in the interest of the Netherlands that other member states are aware of the offensive that is now being launched at various levels."*

### **THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: RESPONSIBLE AND GUILTY**

*While it is finally established that the Netherlands has meticulously hidden information to the European Commission, the latter is far from being innocent.*

*It all began in 2006 with a lie that BLOOM had already revealed: the first 22 derogations for electric fishing were issued by the European Commission against the formal advice of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), from which the Commission claims to have obtained a green light. Moreover, this number already exceeded the 5% limit of the Dutch beam trawlers' fleet.*

*In 2010, the Netherlands requested 20 licences for "scientific research". The European Commission agreed, thinking that the research would be carried out on the 22 vessels already equipped. But in 2011, the Commission opened an investigation when it discovered that this research permit had been used by the Netherlands to grant 20 additional licences, bringing the number of electric fishing vessels to 42. The journalist cites in his article "A very annoying message about electric fishing permits", as one can read in the subject line of an email regarding a visit from Brussels officials. "They continued to ask questions and were not reassured and concluded that they could not see how this 42-vessel figure was realistic. [...] A third official from The Hague refers to the permits having been granted 'contra legem', i.e. against the law." However, and against all expectations, the European Commission decided not to follow up without specifying the reasons for dropping the investigation.*

*In 2014, the European Commission suddenly decided to accommodate the Dutch lies by considering that the 42 vessels indeed only represented 5% of the fleet. At the same time, they agreed to double the number of electric fishing vessels, thereby reaching a total of 84 licences. As the journalist points out: "The Netherlands is abusing the fact that the European Commission has turned a blind eye to their too many vessels already fishing with electricity".*

*The European Commission's headlong rush continued in 2016, when they proposed to lift the 5% limit and therefore generalise electric fishing in the North Sea. This would have allowed the Commission to legalise all the existing fraudulent licences, and make its collusion with the Netherlands a thing of the past.*

### **BLOOM'S COMPLAINTS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

*Since 2017, BLOOM has been engaged in a real tug of war with the European Commission. Despite the complaints filed by the NGO in 2017 and 2019 and the 27,000 citizen complaints during the Fall of 2020, the European Commission still refuses to force the Netherlands to comply with the regulation and to sanction this country accordingly. In February 2019, the Commission finally admitted that the Netherlands was in breach and even considered opening an infringement procedure. But the Commission eventually decided to close the case made by BLOOM using an absurd argument: the Netherlands guaranteed that it had put in place a rotation system in order to respect the maximum authorised number of 15 vessels fishing simultaneously. By misinterpreting the technical measures regulation, the industry was able to maintain its illegal derogations until the implementation of the total ban on electric fishing.*

*Furthermore, in a scientific publication published in March 2019, BLOOM demonstrated that at least 21.5 million euros had been allocated to support, legitimise and develop electric fishing in the Netherlands. However, financial support from the European Union is conditional on strict compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). By equipping more vessels with electric fishing than it was actually allowed, the Netherlands has clearly violated the EU's regulatory framework. As the European Commission has recognised this infringement, the European subsidies that were granted for the development of electric fishing are also completely illegal.*

### **THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG**

*The journalist writes: "The ministry is only making public part of the documents concerning the Dutch electric fishing lobby in Brussels, another part remaining secret. One of the explanations given is that their publication could still lead to European criminal proceedings." The European Commission therefore has all the necessary material to follow up on BLOOM's complaints and prosecute the Netherlands for infringement and illegal fishing. After such revelations, it is urgent that the European Commission takes its responsibilities. The absence of action on its part would be a serious symptom of dysfunction of our institutions and of moral corruption. By not condemning the Dutch state, the European Commission is complicit and encourages illegal practices.*