



Press Release

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New Commission proposal puts EU on path from hero to zero to address global mercury crisis

Brussels, 8 February 2016 – The European Commission has quietly launched its new mercury package on 2nd February 2016 [1], moving the EU a step closer towards ratifying the Minamata Convention, a UN treaty to stamp out mercury [2]. While the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) welcomes the new package, its content fails to meet even the lowest of expectations.

*“We are deeply disappointed with this bare-bones proposal from the Commission,” said **Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Zero Mercury Campaign Project Manager**. “Under the guise of Better Regulation, it is putting the EU on an embarrassing path from hero to zero in addressing the global mercury crisis. The proposal effectively ignores a public consultation, progressive industry voices, and even the scientific findings of its own impact assessment.”*

The package sets out plans to update existing EU law in line with the internationally-agreed goals to limit mercury supply, use and emissions under the treaty. Despite the EU having played a leading role in the formation of the Convention, the new plan to put it into practice appears to have fallen victim to the EU’s Better Regulation agenda. The package was already delayed by over a year – pushing back the UN treaty ratification process [3] – and ambition is thin on the ground.

The new proposals follow the lowest-cost approach across the board rather than promoting higher environmental protection, according to the EEB. Elsewhere, other ‘new’ proposals are simply repackaged existing EU legislation, and some of the treaty requirements seem not to be covered by the proposal at all.

Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans, especially to the developing nervous system. Mercury transforms to neurotoxic methylmercury, which has the capacity to collect in organisms (bioaccumulate) and to concentrate up food chains (biomagnify), especially in the aquatic food chain – fish, the basic food source for millions of people.

Recent studies indicate that mercury levels are increasing in tuna by 4% per year, correlating with the continuing rise in mercury in the global environment. If steps are not taken to reduce global mercury pollution, levels of mercury are expected to double by 2050 [4].

The EEB will now be calling on the European Parliament and Member States to recognise the gravity of the situation and adopt measures that will reduce and eliminate all unnecessary uses and releases of mercury.

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Notes to editors:

[1] Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury by the EU
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/mercury/ratification_en.htm

[2] The Minamata Convention on Mercury <http://www.mercuryconvention.org>

To meet the Convention requirements, six areas are identified which need additional legislation at the EU level:

- The import of mercury
- The export of certain mercury added products
- The use of mercury in certain manufacturing processes
- New mercury uses in product and manufacturing processes
- Mercury use in artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM)
- Mercury use in dental amalgams

[3] NGOs Letter to the European Commission - The EU and its Member States should rapidly ratify the Minamata Convention on mercury, 14 December 2015

http://www.zeromercury.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=file&id=199:the-european-union-eu-and-its-member-states-ms-should-rapidly-ratify-the&Itemid=15

[4] Over the past year, it has become more apparent than ever that the global mercury crisis is affecting the food we eat. Mercury concentrations in tuna are increasing at a rate of 3.8 percent or more per year, according to a new study that suggests rising atmospheric levels of the toxin are to blame. This correlates with recent studies showing that mercury levels in the global environment are set to double by 2050, if current pollution and deposition rates continue. More information: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/02/150202151217.htm>