

## Illegal mercury trade undermines Europe's commitments towards strong mercury controls

Brussels, Belgium/Amman, Jordan, 9 March 2016

Commitments toward stronger global mercury controls are hampered in the EU by illegal mercury trade, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) revealed today on the eve of a UN mercury treaty meeting in Jordan. The EEB stressed that global efforts to reduce mercury emissions may be undercut if gaps in EU mercury trade controls are not filled before the Minamata Convention on Mercury enters into force.

A now defunct German waste recycling company, DELA GmbH, was found in recent years to have illegally exported over 1,000 tons of excess metallic mercury mostly from the EU chlor-alkali industry, circumventing the EU export ban, with the illicit mercury making its way on to the global market. DELA disguised the mercury as "waste" and exported around 500 tonnes to Switzerland, Greece, the Netherlands and other countries.

DELA was reportedly able to get around the EU mercury export ban regulation by not solidifying/stabilising the mercury for storage and disposal as they were required by contractual obligation. The authorities still do not know where all the mercury went, but it is clear that many of the destination countries are known to trade with countries where there is significant artisanal small-scale gold mining. This industry straight-pipes mercury to the environment, also exposing miners and their families to this dangerous neurotoxin.

**Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, EEB Zero Mercury Project Manager**, said:

*"In order to stop the flow we need to first know where the mercury supply comes from and where it goes. The EU needs to do a 'lessons learned analysis' of what went wrong and then enact regulatory changes. While reviewing the new mercury regulations, we call on the EU to set up a trade monitoring system to record mercury trade information from exports and imports from/to the EU, within Member States and also within the industry sector."*

Many countries do not track mercury trade effectively and have no accurate listing of where surplus mercury goes due to a proliferation of illegal or smuggled supplies. At this week's meeting in Jordan, it should be ensured that global reporting yields timely quantitative data on mercury production and trade to understand the global supply situation, and monitor Convention effectiveness in reducing the global mercury supply.

**Michael Bender, ZMWG International Coordinator**, added:

*"Trafficking in mercury is not like selling potato chips. There are well known consequences when mercury gets haphazardly produced, traded and subsequently released into the biosphere. Mercury is a potent persistent neurotoxin that bioaccumulates, posing the greatest risks to developing children, coastal populations and millions of small-scale gold miners using mercury around the globe."*

The EEB believes that to effectively control and manage mercury trade, countries need to enact stronger regulations to track mercury trade from the cradle to the grave.

**Elena Lymberidi-Settimo** concluded:

*“Preventing opportunistic illicit mercury trade through an efficient reporting and monitoring structure will help to prevent it from continuing. This should be a top priority for the EU. New provisions to close loopholes in the export ban, and taking measures going beyond the Treaty requirements, should become an integral part of the EU mercury regulation. Otherwise it will end up being just another paper tiger.”*

**For more information:**

Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, ZMWG International Coordinator, [Elena.lymberidi@eeb.org](mailto:Elena.lymberidi@eeb.org), +32 496 532818

Michael Bender, ZMWG International Coordinator, [mercurypolicy@aol.com](mailto:mercurypolicy@aol.com), +1 802 9174579

Philippa Nuttall Jones, [philippa.jones@eeb.org](mailto:philippa.jones@eeb.org), +32 (0) 2289 13 09

**Notes to editors:**

[1] Minamata Convention on Mercury was agreed in 2013 and has so far been signed by 128 countries and ratified by 23 nations, including the EU. It is designed to protect human health and the environment from mercury pollution. The treaty bans new mercury mines, places control measures on air emissions, imposes regulations on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and enforces the phase out of existing mines and products.

[The meeting in Jordan this week is the seventh session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee \(INC7\)](#) on mercury. Delegates are meeting to agree on the finer details of the agreement. This is the last meeting before the Convention enters into force, once 50 countries ratify it.

[EEB letter to Environment Council March 2016](#), including comments on the EU mercury package.