

**Question for written answer E-003091/2022
to the Commission**

Rule 138

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Subject: Tackling illegal artisanal gold mining in French Guyana

Water quality in French Guiana is being seriously compromised by the illegal extraction of gold owing to the use of mercury to separate the nuggets from the earth and to amalgamate the precious metal.

Aquifer ecosystems which include the fish eaten by local people are being polluted by mercury discharged into the rivers. More than half of the Amerindians of the Upper Maroni are contaminated at rates above the threshold set by the World Health Organisation.

Mercury, which readily accumulates in organic matter, can cause intellectual impairment. In addition, it poses a reprotoxic risk, with the effect of reducing reproductive success.

France is tackling illegal artisanal gold miners by deploying soldiers and police officers. However, they have to monitor an area the size of Portugal, often without passable roads and with ageing equipment. The Puma helicopters used to take troops into the forest are on average 44 years old and require 18 hours of maintenance for every hour of flight.

Will the Commission provide funding for aerial means, including drones, to protect the huge terrestrial and maritime territories of its outermost regions, in particular to combat illegal artisanal gold mining but also illegal fishing?