

Over 1.1 million citizens left waiting: Stop Finning - Stop the Trade organisers file complaint against European Commission

New Ombudsman complaint highlights systemic failures in how the EU handles citizens' initiatives

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The organisers of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "[Stop Finning – Stop the Trade](#)" have filed a formal complaint with the European Ombudsman against the European Commission, citing maladministration in its handling of the initiative backed by more than 1.1 million EU citizens.

The complaint raises concerns about delays and lack of transparency in the Commission's follow-up, including under the responsibility of Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, Costas Kadis.

Despite commitments made in July 2023, including launching an impact assessment by the end of that year, key deadlines have expired. No updated timeline has been provided.

"More than one million Europeans asked the EU to act. Instead, we are met with silence and delays," said Christian Hempel.

"An expired timeline is no timeline. If the Commission can simply ignore its own commitments, what does that mean for European democracy?"

The complaint identifies three key failures:

- A breach of transparency obligations under the ECI Regulation, including the refusal to provide a revised timeline;
- A failure to act within a reasonable timeframe, in violation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- A broader systemic pattern affecting multiple successful ECIs.

The Stop Finning case is not isolated. Other major citizens' initiatives, including those calling to end cage farming and ban fur farming, have faced similar delays and lack of follow-up.

Together, these cases raise fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the ECI as a democratic tool, designed to give citizens a direct voice in EU policymaking.

The organisers are calling on the European Ombudsman to open an inquiry and to recommend that the Commission:

- Provide a clear and updated timeline for action;
- Report publicly on the commitments it has already made;
- Ensure that future ECIs are handled in a timely and transparent manner.

"This is not just about sharks," Christian Hempel added.

"It's about whether 1 million Europeans can shape EU policy or whether their voices can be quietly set aside."

The complaint comes at a critical moment, as EU institutions face growing scrutiny over transparency and democratic accountability.

Notes to editors

- The “Stop Finning – Stop the Trade” ECI gathered 1,119,996 validated signatures across the EU.
- It calls for a ban on the trade of detached shark fins in the EU.
- The European Commission responded in July 2023, committing to assess possible measures, but key deadlines have since been missed.
- The European Citizens’ Initiative is the EU’s main instrument of participatory democracy, enshrined in Article 11(4) of the Treaty on European Union.

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