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T-PVS (2016) 12

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
Strasbourg, 15-18 November 2016

**Meeting of the Select Group of Experts on
Invasive Alien Species**

31 March-1 April 2016
Rome (Italy)

- MEETING REPORT -

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting;
- Take note of the progress of Convention activities in the field of Invasive Alien Species, in particular on Codes of Conduct, management of pathways and risk assessment;
- Take note of possible work ahead;
- Examine and, if appropriate, adopt a draft Recommendation on the control of American mink (*Neovison vison*) in Europe.

1. PROGRESS IN THE PREPARATION OF NEW CODES OF CONDUCT. INFORMATION ON ON-GOING CODES (PLANTED FORESTS, RECREATIONAL BOATING)

*[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 1 – Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and Invasive Alien Trees]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 19 - European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species]*

The Secretariat informed the Select Group that the [Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species](#) would be circulated for comment in April and presented for endorsement to the next meeting of the Standing Committee in November 2016.

The Consultant, Mr Giuseppe Brundu, informed the Select Group that he had received a number of comments on the [Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and Invasive Alien Trees](#). Some, even critical, could be well integrated. Others were more problematic to integrate as they required changes in the terminology adopted by the CBD and accepted by the Bern Convention. The Select Group thought the new version could be sent to the Standing Committee for endorsement in November 2016.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND AWARENESS OF EXISTING CODES OF CONDUCT AND NEW CODES OF CONDUCT

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 10 – Report of the 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species]

The Secretariat presented “illustrated versions” of the codes that had been adopted. They can be downloaded from the “Publications” link at the website of the Group of Experts (<http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/on-invasive-alien-species>).

The Select Group considered a priority to continue making user-friendly illustrated versions of codes of conduct so States may translate them into national languages and distribute them to target groups.

The Secretariat will contact Parties to further such work and make the codes better known, asking for the help on national governments in this endeavor.

Regarding new codes there was some consensus that internet trade / e-commerce was a pathway that was responsible for the introduction and spread of many IAS in Europe although it could prove rather difficult to elaborate a code of conduct. Perhaps a collection of good practice could be an alternative approach. The Secretariat will look into its elaboration.

A possible new code to be prepared would be one on international travel and IAS. It would include regular tourism activities (i.e. illegal importation of pets or seeds by European tourist returning from other regions), business travelling and regular movements of migrants from / to their countries of origin when it concerns a European State. Those migrants can move food, seeds, pets, or inadvertently carry seeds, insects etc. The code could be addressed to travel operators, air companies, cruisers and other business involved in international travel.

3. INFORMATION ON THE RUDDY DUCK – OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING OF EXPERTS IN NANTES (DECEMBER 2015)

[T-PVS/Inf (2016) 1 – Report of the Expert meeting on the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of ruddy duck in Europe]

The Secretariat informed briefly the Select Group on the results of the meeting of experts held in Nantes in December 2015. The eradication plan continues to be implemented but not at the speed foreseen. There are still around 200 wintering birds in *Lac de Grandlieu* (France) with still operational difficulties to cull. The Netherlands and Belgium have smaller populations but very poor records of culling birds. The eradication plan will be updated for 2010-2020.

4. INFORMATION ON AMERICAN MINK IN POLAND AND OTHER STATES

[T-PVS/Files (2016) 14 – Possible spread of the American mink (Neovison vison) in Poland – Report by the Government]

The Bureau of the Convention had asked the Select Group for an opinion on a file case against Poland for insufficient efforts to avoid release of American mink from mink farms.

After Mr Solarz presented the short report of the government of Poland, the Select Group discussed the problem of American mink in the whole of Europe. The main risks for biodiversity from mink escaped from farms are in areas where the native species (European mink) exists and also in those of importance for birds where American mink can be very destructive. Some States (the United

Kingdom, the Netherlands) have stopped mink farming, in many others the farming is not very developed and for Poland it is a growing concern (although around 60 % of the European mink farming is concentrated in Denmark).

As the species will most likely not be included in the lists of species of Union concern in the new EU Regulation on IAS, it would be appropriate that the Bern Convention adopts a recommendation aiming to control feral populations of American mink, avoid accident escape and prohibit deliberate release of American minks.

The Group thought there was not substance for a case file under Bern but asked the Standing Committee to examine and, if appropriate, adopt the draft recommendation in appendix 3 to this report.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU REGULATION ON IAS AND OF SIMILAR MEASURES IN NON-EU STATES

In the absence (because of disruption of flights at the Brussels airport following a terrorist attack) of the delegate of the European Commission, this issue could not be properly dealt with.

Information provided by different participants was in the sense that a list of species of Union concern was to be adopted in the next weeks even if there are still different opinions as to the number of species to be included.

The delegate of Norway informed in some detail of the procedures established in his State. There are national action plans for particular IAS and also a general restriction of use of some alien species (for instance for *Bombus terrestris* in pollination). Norway also counts with a National Strategy on IAS.

Further information was provided from Spain in which, after the adoption of the 2011 catalogue of IAS, the Supreme Court has banned some alien species of commercial interest that had been deleted from the catalogue by the government (e.g. Barbary sheep, Louisiana crayfish or rainbow trout).

6. MANAGEMENT OF PATHWAYS

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 24 - Guidance for governments concerning invasive alien species pathways action plans]

The consultant, Mr Riccardo Scalera, presented his report, which was aimed to provide guidance to governments. The report had been well received and had been the subject of many comments by governments. It was also the base of work to be presented by ISSG to CBD. It was likely that CBD endorses the guidance presented so this Bern Convention work (like some of the codes of conduct) are serving as models for producing global guidance on IAS.

The document will be finalised at the end of June and be sent to States for information.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 27 - Report on the methods to carry out risk assessments for mammals]

The consultant, Mr Sandro Bertolino, presented his report which describes a methodology to carry out risk assessment for mammals. The methodology had been tried out in two species: Finlayson's squirrel (*Callosciurus finlaysonii*) and Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*). For a third species, the Indian mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*), a taxonomic research had proved the species was considered by most mammalogists as conspecific with *H. javanicus* for which risk assessment exists, so it was not necessary to repeat the risk assessment.

The Select Group welcomed the information and methodology presented which can be used by Bern Convention governments as a model for their own risk assessments. The document will be finalised and sent to governments for information. It was clear the role of the Bern Convention was not to produce risk assessments for all alien species of European concern but to present a methodology. It would also be useful if governments subject their risks assessments to international peer-reviews so as to make the assessment more solid and accepted.

8. OTHER ISSUES OF INTEREST

➤ Classifying IAS by their environmental impact

Mr Piero Genovesi, Chair of ISSG, presented a unified classification of alien species based on their environmental impacts which will permit to detect species that, in one or other geographical areas in which they are not native, have caused significant impacts on other species or ecosystems. The system, called EICAT (Environmental Impact Classification for Alien Taxa) will soon be endorsed by IUCN (much as the IUCN Red List system of categories of threat).

It can classify species on their recorded environmental impact as MV – massive impact, MR – major impact, MO – moderate impact, MN – minor impact and MC – minimal concern. The system is not comparable to a proper risk assessment but it permits to detect some species whose spread or introduction may cause environmental impacts.

Soon IUCN will analyse for environmental impact all species in the database of alien taxa (Global Invasive Species Database).

➤ Alien species dangerous to people

Mr Juan Luis Rodríguez Luengo introduced the topic. In his view, national IAS regulation should also cover species that are health hazards (such as *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) as well as those that are dangerous to people (i.e. venomous animals, toxic seeds). The topic exceeds the field of the Bern Convention and CBD which both focus on species that threaten biological diversity but participants saw value in the integrated approach proposed.

➤ Wildlife pathogens and IAS

Mr Riccardo Scalera introduced the subject. Wildlife pathogens (such as *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*) are not covered by the EU Regulation or regular Bern Convention work on IAS. He suggested that the Convention could present a draft recommendation dealing with wildlife pathogens, as it had been done in 2015 for *B. salamandrivorans*.

9. POSSIBLE WORK AHEAD

The Select Group forward work on the following topics:

- ✓ Codes of Conduct: publicising of existing codes and possible elaboration of a code of conduct on e-commerce and IAS, and a code of conduct on international travel and IAS;
- ✓ Identification of alien species for priority risk assessment. Risk assessment for groups of alien species (i.e. geckos, squirrels, tortoises);
- ✓ Use of other legal instruments (postal regulations, sanitary regulations, wildlife trade regulation) to prevent entry and spread of IAS;
- ✓ Dealing with wildlife pathogens.

10. NEXT MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS

The Secretariat informed that the next meeting of the Group of Experts will be held in Funchal (Madeira, Portugal) in May or June 2017. The meeting will be held back to back with a one-day seminar on “Eradication of IAS in small European islands”.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

Appendix 1



7 April 2016

T-PVS (2016) 2

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Meeting of the Select Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species

31st March 9:30 am - 1st April 2016 (closure at 1pm)

Rome (Italy)

Palazzo Cenci-Bolognetti, Piazza delle Cinque Scole, 23, Rome 00186, Italy

AGENDA

1. **Progress in the preparation of new Codes of conduct. Information on on-going codes (Planted Forests, Recreational Boating)**
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 1 – Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and Invasive Alien Trees]
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 19 - European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species]
2. **Implementation and awareness of existing codes of conduct and new codes of conduct**
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 10 – Report of the 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species]
3. **Information on the ruddy duck – Outcomes of the meeting of experts in Nantes (December 2015)**
[T-PVS/Inf (2016) 1 – Report of the Expert meeting on the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of ruddy duck in Europe]
4. **Information on American mink in Poland and other States**
[T-PVS/Files (2016) 14 – Possible spread of the American mink (Neovison vison) in Poland – Report by the Government]
5. **Implementation of the EU Regulation on IAS and of similar measures in non-EU States**
6. **Management of pathways**
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 24 - Guidance for governments concerning invasive alien species pathways action plans]
7. **Risk assessment**
[T-PVS/Inf (2015) 27 - Report on the methods to carry out risk assessments for mammals]
8. **Other issues of interest:**
 - Classifying IAS by their environmental impact;
 - Alien species dangerous to people
 - Wildlife pathogens and IAS
9. **Possible work ahead**
10. **Next meeting of the Group of Experts**
11. **Any other business**

Appendix 2

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Appendix 3



Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

Draft Recommendation No. ... (2016) of the Standing Committee, examined on ... November 2016, on the control of the American mink (*Neovison vison*) in Europe

The Standing Committee to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under Article 14 of the convention,

Recalling that under Article 11, paragraph 2.b of the Convention, each Contracting Party undertakes to strictly control the introduction of non-native species;

Recalling Recommendation No. 31 (1991) of the Standing Committee on the protection of the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*);

Recalling Recommendation No. 99 (2003) of the Standing Committee on the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species (IAS);

Aware that the spread of feral populations of American mink is a serious threat to the survival of the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*), a species with critically endangered (CR) status in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species;

Worried by the impact on other protected biodiversity (birds, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles) of the predation by American mink;

Aware that mink farms, if not properly managed, are the main course of release of American mink in nature;

Noting that introduction of American mink in islands with high densities of breeding populations of birds has resulted in severe predation, particularly of marine birds,

Recommends that Contracting Parties and invites Observer States to:

Feral population:

1. Consider carrying out national campaigns aimed to reduce or contain American mink populations in the wild;
2. Draft national action plans for control or eradication, with special focus on eradication of American mink in small islands important for nesting birds;

Pets:

3. Discourage the use of American minks as pets and consider the prohibition of its sale in pet trade;

Farms:

4. Consider phasing out American mink farming;
5. Avoid the establishment of new mink farms in areas of special importance as breeding wintering or migration sites for birds;

6. Request environmental impact assessment for new mink farms;
7. Recommend that permits for new mink farms be approved by national conservation authorities;
8. Remove financial incentives for establishment of new mink farms;
9. establish mandatory marking of minks kept in farms and require that farms keep and transmit to conservation authorities records of animals bred, sold and escaped;
10. Establish an early alert system for escapes and an efficient recapture system;
11. Implement a system of controls of existing mink farms to check if they have efficient systems to avoid accidental escape of animals;
12. Establish national guidelines to prevent accidental escapes from mink farms and ensure that new mink farms comply with those guidelines;
13. Prohibit the deliberate release of American mink in nature.