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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

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**Other complaint**

**Presumed large-scale exploitation and  
marketing of protected marine shelled molluscs  
in Greece**

**REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT**

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## **PRESUMED LARGE-SCALE EXPLOITATION AND MARKETING OF PROTECTED MARINE SHELLED MOLLUSCS IN GREECE**

The reason of this complaint is the large-scale exploitation and marketing of protected marine shelled molluscs in Greece, including species protected by the Bern convention and other regional or international conventions (including EU legislation).

The extent of illegal trading of protected bivalves and gastropods in Greek seafood restaurants was investigated in a study conducted between June 2009 and June 2011, after noticing that such species were being offered as food. This study was conducted by interviewing owners or managers of 219 seafood restaurants in 92 localities. Interviews were based on questionnaires regarding the frequency of availability in the menus and the origin of twenty-one species or groups of species, among which eight are protected – and hence are being illegally exploited. Forty-two percent of the surveyed restaurants were found to serve at least one of the protected and hence illegally exploited species. Among these, the date mussel *Lithophaga lithophaga*, the common piddock *Pholas dactylus*, the giant tun *Tonna galea* are included in Annex II of the Bern Convention. The latter two were found in very few Greek seafood restaurants but *L. lithophaga* was found in a considerable number of restaurants. *L. lithophaga* was served in 22.8% of the restaurants (regularly in 11.4%). In some localities these percentages were markedly higher, e.g. along the coastline of the Evvoikos Gulfs, *L. lithophaga* was served in >65% of the seafood restaurants (regularly in nearly 50%).

This study was published in 2011 [Katsanevakis S, Poursanidis D, Issaris Y, Panou A, Petza D, Vassilopoulou V, Chalداiou I, Sini M, 2011. “Protected” marine shelled molluscs: thriving in Greek seafood restaurants. *Mediterranean Marine Science* 12(2): 429–438] and can be found online in the following links:

<http://www.medit-mar-sc.net/index.php/marine/article/view/42>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230729383\\_Protected\\_marine\\_shelled\\_molluscs\\_thriving\\_in\\_Greek\\_seafood\\_restaurants?ev=prf\\_pub](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230729383_Protected_marine_shelled_molluscs_thriving_in_Greek_seafood_restaurants?ev=prf_pub)

Since the publication of this study nothing has change in Greece. “Protected” species are still illegally exploited and marketed. Surveillance and enforcement is clearly inadequate.

The above are clear violations of article 6 of the Bern convention (amongst others), which specify that the Contracting Parties shall take all ‘appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the special protection of the wild fauna species specified in Appendix II’. It is further specified that each Contracting Party shall, as appropriate, prohibit the possession or sale of these species and that all forms of deliberate capture and keeping and deliberate killing is obviously prohibited as is the internal trade in such species (alive or dead).

### **Affected species**

Mainly Date mussels (*Lithophaga lithophaga*) but also the common piddock (*Pholas dactylus*) and the Giant tun *Tonna galea*.

All these are listed in Annex II of the Bern Convention. Geographical area concerned: Greek coastal waters.

The affected species, as documented by Katsanevakis et al. (2011), are also protected under other international conventions or European legislation:

- *Lithophaga lithophaga*: Habitats Directive (Annex IV), Barcelona Convention (Annex II)
- *Pholas dactylus*: Barcelona Convention (Annex II)
- *Tonna galea*: Barcelona Convention (Annex II)

In addition to the abovementioned species, *Pinna nobilis* was found to be served in 16.4% of the restaurants (regularly in 5.0%). It is not included in the Bern Convention but it is protected by the Habitats Directive (Annex IV) and the Barcelona Convention (Annex II).

### **Negative effects for the populations involved**

An astonishing large percentage of Greek seafood restaurants have been serving protected species for a number of years. It is quite possible that this percentage is even higher, as some of the interviewees were very cautious and it is likely they did not give honest and factual replies for illegally traded species.

The populations of all the Annex II species are declining in the Mediterranean and in particular in Greek coastal areas. Protection through international agreements and European or national legislation was decided on the basis of a need to reduce mortality and to allow these populations to recover. Continuing intense exploitation for illegal trading in seafood restaurants will render the achievement of this goal unfeasible.

Furthermore, weak enforcement and ineffective surveillance leads to an overall bad mentality of non-compliance. Stakeholders (fishermen, traders, restaurant owners) that complied with regulations and restricted their former range of activities feel deceived and adopt a sceptical or negative attitude towards legislation for protection of marine species. Restaurant owners, who might not wish to illegally serve protected species, are forced to do so in order to face competition.

Especially for *Lithophaga lithophaga* its harvesting has serious implications for the shallow rocky subtidal habitats. Their harvesting is usually conducted by divers equipped with special sledgehammers, who break rocky substrates removing the first centimeters of rock to collect the bivalves. Such fishing practices cause direct damages to benthic assemblages by eradicating sessile animals and algae, alter biotic interactions, and favour local increase in sea urchin population densities and the persistence of barren rock.

Moreover, it is known that this mussel takes ages to develop and for a normally sized specimen it could have taken up to 80 years of development to reach that stage.