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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

Other complaint :

**Presumed risk of national extinction
of badgers (*Meles meles*)
in Ireland**

REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT

*Document prepared by
The Irish Wildlife Trust*

Complaint No. 2014/1
Presumed risk of national extinction of badgers (*Meles meles*) in Ireland

The European Badger (*Meles meles*) is an Annex III species under the Bern Convention.

Given the increase in culling since 2006 widespread disturbance and localized extinctions over significant areas of the country are occurring. This is particularly evident within the ~30% of agricultural land where culling operations are intensive.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine of the Republic of Ireland have been culling the European Badger (*Meles meles*) since the 1980's under Article 9 Section 1 of the Bern Convention. This programme has resulted in the local disappearance and serious disturbance to this protected species over vast areas of its national distribution. This is contrary to the spirit of Article 8 of the convention.

Given the intensive nature of this culling programme the Irish Authorities made the commitment to the Bern Secretariat and to the Irish people on several occasions that badger removal operations will be confined, cumulatively, to not more than 30% of the agricultural land of the country. Despite this commitment the Irish Authorities confirmed in their latest communication to the standing committee (3-6 December 2013) that the area of agricultural land under capture in December 2012 was 31.05%. Limiting the amount of land under capture was supposed to be a conservation measure. By going beyond this figure presumably the conservation of Irish badgers is therefore in question.

To circumvent this breach of the Bern convention the authorities, according to the 2012 report, will alter the way they report the amount of land under capture. *“Any sett among the 30,000 recorded where either a badger has been captured or any sett within a kilometre of a sett where a capture has ever taken place will be excluded and of the remaining setts any that have been on the system for 3 or more years without any successful capturing's having taken place will be excluded from the buffered areas contributing to the aggregated area under capture. This modification results in a 12% reduction in the area under capture when compared to the previously used figure”*.

Effectively by removing setts where badgers have been eradicated from the total of the land under capture the Irish Authorities are masking the true intensity of their operations. This should not be allowed in the interests of the conservation of the European badger in Ireland. The area of capture methodology does not give an indication of the current status of the badger population nationally. A review of the status of the national badger population is needed urgently.

To date over 100,000 badgers have been officially culled. Other threats such as illegal culling, badger baiting, habitat loss and the expansion of the national road network mean that the national badger population is under threat. The current status of the species is unknown as the national badger population is poorly defined. Badgers are known to play an important role in temperate ecosystems as they act as ecosystem engineers, seed dispersers and predators. Its localized disappearance is therefore highly likely to be having a negative impact on a wide range of habitats and species.

Moreover, the Irish Authorities have failed to submit any of the biennial reports required under Article 9 Section 2 of the Convention. There is no record of Ireland submitting reports during the 2005-2006, 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 reporting period. This serious breach was brought to the attention of Eladio Fernandez Galiano the head of the Council's Biological Diversity Unit, and he requested in January 2013 that the Irish Authorities submit these missing records as a matter of urgency. Despite the seriousness of this breach and the dire conservation status of the European badger in Ireland no reports have been submitted to date.

To our knowledge Ireland has not attended the standing committee meeting this year (2014), and has not sent biennial reports to the Secretariat for the 2011-2013 reporting period. This breach highlights the general disregard in which the Irish authorities hold the convention.

It is also deeply concerning that firstly the Bern Secretariat failed to identify this breach and that secondly they have failed to deal with this issue over the course of 2013. This is made all the worse by the fact that that the Secretariat identified the monitoring of the legal application of Article 9 as one of its primary concerns in both 2012 and 2013.