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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
Strasbourg, 29 November – 3 December 2021

Complaint on stand-by: 2017/6

**Possible negative impact on Breiðafjörður
Nature Reserve's authentic birch woods from
new road infrastructure
(Iceland)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources of Iceland*

- October 2021 -



The Bern Convention
c/o The Bureau of the Standing Committee

UMHVERFIS-OG
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Reykjavík October 27, 2021
Reference: UMH21050028/20.12.2

Subject: Complaint on stand-by no. 2017/6

Regarding a request for an on-the-spot appraisal (OSA) due to complaint on stand-by no. 2017/6: *Iceland: Possible negative impact on Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve's authentic birch woods from new road infrastructure*, the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) would like to clarify the following:

As previously reported by Icelandic authorities [Reference: files22e_2018.docx] The Vestfjarðarvegur (60) road project carried out by the Icelandic Road Administration (IRA) has gone through all required public procedures. During these procedures concerns have been raised by the Icelandic Planning Agency (IPA), Icelandic Institution for Natural History (IINH), NGO's and others regarding the effects that the road project, particularly the route chosen from several alternatives (Route D-H), will have on the natural environment of the area.

Despite these concerns, the IPA, on November 22nd, 2019, signed off on a change to Reykhólar municipality's General Plan, where Route D-H is presented as the chosen route for the road. After IPA's approval, Reykhólar municipality issued a development permit for the project.

The decision by Reykhólar municipality to grant a development permit was appealed to the Environmental and Natural Resources Board of Appeal (ENRBA) on March 23rd, 2020. The appeal was overruled by ENRBA on October 1st, 2020.

On July 23rd 2021, due to ENRBA's decision to overrule the appeal, landowners at Gröf, the only landowners at the area that IRA had not reached an agreement with regarding the project, decided to allow the project to go ahead on their land under specific requirements that focus on mitigating the impact of the project at Gröf.

Due to this agreement with Gröf, IRA announced that the project could now continue. Due to IRA's announcement, MENR requested information regarding the status of the project, as well as what mitigation efforts were planned by IRA.

MENR has recently received information from IRA regarding the request:

In October 2020 a report was written regarding what requirements and actions were necessary according to the development permit issued by Reykhólar municipality. Based on that report, IRA requested a report from The Natural Science Institute of the Westfjords (NSIW) on what monitoring- and research measures were necessary to fulfill the requirements of the development permit. In April 2021 NSIW submitted the report to IRA. Following the report, IRA signed a contract with NSIW and the Icelandic Marine & Freshwater Research Institute (IMFRI) to do the monitoring and research detailed in NSIW's report.

Considering the above, The Ministry for the Environment and Natural resources recommends that the OSA will be carried out in the following fashion:

MENR will assist The Standing Committee by organizing virtual meetings with relevant institutions (Icelandic Road Administration, Icelandic Planning Agency, The Icelandic Environment Agency, The Natural Science Institute of the Westfjords, The Icelandic Institute for Natural History), Reykhólar Municipality, NGO's (Birdlife Iceland, Icelandic Environment Association), and other relevant specialists and stakeholders that will be necessary to meet with. MENR is of the opinion that the subjects of these meetings should take note of the terms of reference (ToR) of the Standing Committee's request (reference: files02e_2021.docx). However, since the development of the road has started, it is MENR's suggestion that the focus of the meetings should be on the following point:

- Identify mitigation measures to ensure the conservation of affected habitats and species, and concrete monitoring plans for the use of the road and its effects

With regard to this point, MENR would like to emphasize that IRA (Vegagerðin) has informed the ministry that The Natural Science Institute of the Westfjords (NSIW) has submitted a report to IRA on what monitoring- and research measures are necessary to fulfill the requirements of the development permit. The report is in Icelandic but since the report's content is in line with the above-suggested ToR point, it will be important to discuss it at the virtual meetings.

As for the Standing Committees request on assessing Iceland's process of nominating areas to the Emerald Network, MENR refers to an email from the ministry sent to Mrs. Ursula Sticker and Mr. Eoghan Kelly on September 14th 2021, where it is announced that IINH is in the process of gathering data for five sites that Iceland intends to nominate to the Emerald Network.

On behalf of the Minister


Björn Helgi Barkarson


Steinar Kaldal

- August 2021 -

The Icelandic Road Administration (IRA) has reached an agreement with landowners at Gröf in Þorskafjörður where road construction (Vestfjarðavegur-road 60 from Birkilundur to Skálanes) is planned, going through Teigsskógur birch woods of the Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve. Landowners at Gröf where the only landowners that IRA had not reached an agreement with. According to the agreement the IRA's developments in the area must have as little environmental impact as possible.

The Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources has sent an inquiry to IRA and Reykhólahreppur Municipality (the municipality where the road construction is planned) and asked for information about the status of the development in light of these news. The ministry has also asked for information on what actions will be taken to minimize the environmental impact of the project.

We will share that information with Bern when it arrives.

Steinar Kaldal, sérfræðingur / Head of Division

Skrifstofa landgæða / Department of Land and Natural Heritage

Umhverfis- og auðlindaráðuneytið / Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources