



Workshop on the illegal importation of wild meat 12 December 2024

The international movement of wild meat in passengers' luggage is an important aspect of the illegal wildlife trade to and within the European Union. In addition to the negative impact on wild animal populations and ecosystems in the countries of origin, it can pose risks to human and animal health in both source and destination countries. For the latter reason, the European Union prohibits the entry into its territory of personal consignments of meat products from third countries. Regular checks and seizures take place at European airports through routines and scheduled controls, and it must be recognised that it remains complex for public authorities to grasp the scale of this trafficking and to act effectively against it. Not all illegal wild meat products can be intercepted at the borders and sophisticated trafficking techniques and limited law enforcement capacity allow for illegally traded wild meat to end up in the sales and consumption chain. Member States must therefore put in place strategies to prevent these illegal products from entering the national territory, with a One Health approach at their heart. They should strengthen collaboration with all relevant actors: Government administration, Border controls forces, Law Enforcement Intelligence, Judiciary, Scientific institutions, Civil society and the Private sector, and at the national, regional and international levels.

Against this backdrop, an interministerial Task Force on 'Sustainable Wildlife Trade' has been set up in Belgium to develop a strategy to combat the illegal wild meat trade. This work is part of a more comprehensive approach that aims to set up a responsible value chain in the legal and illegal trade in exotic animals, in the light of sanitary and environmental risks. Currently 22 actions relating to the illegal importation and consumption of wild meat form the current Belgian draft blueprint for action (see below). In view to update the scientific data that will support the final policy decision-making, a scientific research project 'INTERCEPT', led by the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, started in 2022 its work to monitor the import of wild meat, and to assess the pathogens they carry.

The trade in illegal wild meat is not specific to Belgium, and collaboration is necessary to take place at European level, more specifically amongst neighbouring countries such as France and the Netherlands. France, for example, has set up a national working group focusing on illegal imports of wild species and wild meat in passengers' luggage in 2023, which adopted an action plan on the illegal wild meat trade.

Taking part in the workshop will provide useful opportunities to provide insights on the situation in the source countries, to get a broader view of the possible ecological and sanitary risks at stake, to share the latest scientific data and information, to exchange on experiences, challenges and actions planned related to the illegal wild meat trade, to discuss the need for regular exchanges and possible synergetic actions between neighbouring countries, NGOs' and the private sector, and to assess the possible solutions.

It will also enable selected experts to discuss in small groups on recommendations for concrete actions that could serve national policies for three specific topics:

- Knowledge, data collection and research, including on pathogens
- Control and enforcement
- Reinforced controls and support from the private sector

An outcome document outlining the priority recommendations that will be identified and endorsed during the workshop will be drafted after the meeting under the leadership of the workshop's chair. This document will be used by the Belgian National Task Force to submit to ministers a final draft action plan on the illegal importation and consumption of wild meat in 2025.

List of actions in the Belgian action plan for responsible trade in exotic animals related to illegal wild meat:

AXIS 1: Gaining knowledge	
Scope 1: Identification of species from wild meat seizures and associated supply chains	
1	Analyse data on illegal imports
2	Analyse the supply chain (importation)
3	Collect data on sales and consumption
4	Analyse the supply chain (sales and consumption)
Scope 2: Identification of health risks and the need for pathogen surveillance	
5	Identify import associated risks to human and animal health and biodiversity
6	Identify the illegal sale and consumption associated risks to human and animal health and biodiversity
7	Analyse the needs and current scientific capacity to carry out monitoring and surveillance of health and environmental risks at the borders
8	Analyse the needs and current scientific capacity for monitoring and surveillance of the risks associated with illegal sale and consumption
9	Implement a monitoring of health and environmental risks at the borders and develop a centre of knowledge
AXIS 2: Continuous data collection and centralization	
10	Ensure continuous collection of data from illegal imports
11	Evaluate the possibility of creating a centralised database on imports of wild meat
AXIS 3: Control	
12	Evaluate the legislation, staffing needs and procedures related to border controls
13	Ensure that legislation is fit for purpose
14	Strengthen the management structure at the borders with a view to optimising control
15	Evaluate the tools used for traceability and identification at borders
16	Strengthen coordination with the transport sector
17	Ensure the collection of samples according to a common protocol for border controls
18	Evaluate the legislations that can be activated in case of illegal sale & consumption
19	Assess, based on trade knowledge, whether it is necessary to include specific controls targeting wild meat in the programmed control actions
AXIS 4: Enforce & prosecute	
20	Assess whether the illegal importation of wild meat, as well as its illegal sale and consumption, should be given priority in criminal policy
AXIS 5: Sensibilisation	
21	Setting up an overall communication strategy for passengers
22	Setting up an overall communication strategy for sellers and consumers