

Dutch Government response to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU Approach against Wildlife Trafficking.

The Dutch Government welcomes the Commission's Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU Approach to Wildlife Trafficking.

The Government endorses the analysis of the problems as described in the Communication and agrees with the Commission that the wildlife trafficking is a serious threat to biodiversity and to sustainable development.

In this response, the Government wants to give an initial assessment of the questions asked in the Communication. The Government thinks that a good and thorough discussion is required. The Netherlands is therefore keen to see the response of other Member States, the European Parliament and other stakeholders, such as third countries and NGOs. The Netherlands will take an active part in the debate, and will be represented at the conference organised by the Commission on 10 and 11 April, to hear the stakeholders' views.

The considerable political urgency of the problems surrounding the illegal wildlife trade is clear from the recent focus on this issue in the European Parliament, national parliaments and the media. Lately there has been a series of *high level* meetings at which the Netherlands has been represented at political level.

The Dutch Government is committed to developing a series of projects with both supply and demand-side countries and civil society organisations, ranging from park management, forensic research and expertise in container scans to efforts to reduce demand. The Government has also undertaken to support these projects with Dutch funding and expertise. The Netherlands is also calling attention to wildlife trafficking in both its bilateral and multilateral contacts.

The Netherlands considers that the current EU policy and legislative framework to counter the illegal wildlife trade is sufficient, and that new legislation is therefore unnecessary and undesirable.

An important principle for the Netherlands is that activities at European level must have a clear added value in relation to the activities undertaken by the Member States and other stakeholders.

An action plan as proposed by the European Parliament should meet the criterion of adding real value at European level. At this point it is not clear to the Netherlands what form such an action plan would take. As stated in the Communication, the Commission already makes a valuable contribution in different areas to combating illegal trade. For now the Netherlands thinks that making good use of existing instruments will be more effective than developing new plans.

Better use could be made of the 'green diplomacy network' at European level. Within this network information can be shared about the efforts of Member States, the EU and the Commission in international forums and at project level. Exchange of knowledge and coordination within the network can help to make these efforts more effective.

Enforcement at the external borders of the EU internal market is a top priority for the Netherlands. In the Port of Rotterdam and at Schiphol Airport, the Netherlands offers a substantial contribution to preventing the illegal trade to and via the EU.

The Netherlands thinks that implementation of the legislation regarding enforcement has a national character. Within Europe there are regular discussions about CITES enforcement cases and trends. The Netherlands takes an active part in these discussions and thinks that this forum is adequate for discussion of the effectiveness of enforcement within Europe.

In recent years, the Netherlands has made various contributions to the financing of the EU Trade in Wildlife Information Exchange (TWIX) network and it will make another contribution to EU TWIX this year.

When it comes to reducing demand, the Netherlands sees a clear role for NGOs and the private sector. The most effective way to change consumption patterns is to call consumers directly to account for their behaviour. The Netherlands supports the organisation Traffic which is implementing a project in this area in China.

The increasing role of organised crime and the associated corruption, along with evidence of involvement of terrorist networks in the illegal wildlife trade is a matter of great concern to the Netherlands. The Dutch Government considers that organised crime and corruption are serious obstacles to the socio-economic and administrative development of developing countries. This general conclusion about organised crime also applies to specific forms such as wildlife trafficking.

The Netherlands will continue its current policy in regard to providing technical assistance and training, where applicable through implementing partners such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In general, the Netherlands also supports the increasing role of Europol and Eurojust in combating organised crime, including wildlife trafficking.

As mentioned above, the Dutch government gives high priority to combating the illegal wildlife trade. Therefore the Netherlands is keen to work with the Member States and the Commission to ensure the most effective approach to combating this illegal trade.