

Will the Invasive Species Regulation be rendered an empty shell?

28 January 2014, Brussels - Efforts to tackle problems caused by Invasive Alien Species across the EU risk being derailed by MEPs in the Environment Committee when they vote on Thursday on whether or not to allow Member States (MS) to freely pick and choose exemptions from a law proposed by the Commission in last September. This fast moving legislation is expected to be concluded in a 'first reading agreement' between the EU institutions in March [1], but direction negotiations are currently taking risks turning it into an empty shell.

Member States' enthusiasm to effectively deal with one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss both in Europe and globally, seem to have completely disappeared when the industry came knocking on their door. The ambitious legal framework is now being dismantled by the same MS who previously called for it and MEPs are following suit. Derogations being proposed by a number of MEPs mirror the push by certain Member States in Council, among them also some that would proclaim themselves as being ambitious when it comes to environmental legislation. Denmark for example, backed by some other MS, is advocating for an exemption to protect their mink fur farms. Similarly, the UK is pushing for derogations so that its horticulturalists would continue cultivating water hyacinth, commonly referred to as one of the world's worst aquatic weeds, despite the fact that some MS are investing millions in managing its devastating impacts. Since species don't stop at borders such exemptions would undermine the entire purpose of the Regulation. [2]

Martina Mlinaric, EEB Senior Policy Officer for Biodiversity, Water and Soil commented '*Allowing exemptions for Member States is like everyone mopping up the flood while one person leaves the tap flowing. It will undermine efforts to tackle the grave and costly problems caused by invasive alien species.*'

Invasive alien species (IAS) cause significant damage to biodiversity, ecosystem services, human health and the economy. In the EU alone, the costs are estimated to be at least €12 billion annually. Such species are by nature a European problem that no single country can solve on its own; increased cooperation and effective measures adopted by all affected countries are needed. The adoption of a strong IAS Regulation, without derogations, therefore represents a vital step in addressing this problem in the EU, which is expected to be further exacerbated by climate change, habitat destruction and increased global trade and travel.

Carles Carboneras, Species Policy Officer at RSPB/ BirdLife UK said '*We need a single, EU-wide list of invasive alien species, applicable to all and in all circumstances. The EU principle of solidarity needs to be enacted - invasive species easily cross national borders, meaning your problem today is my problem tomorrow.*'

ENDS

[1] <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2013/0307%28COD%29>

[2] Joint NGO briefing on derogations in IAS: <http://www.eeb.org/EEB/?LinkServID=4FDB7B48-5056-B741-DB3DFCE8620929BE>



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Press contacts:

Alison Abrahams, EEB Communications Officer

+32 (0) 2289 13 09 or +32 (0) 489 304 962

alison.abrahams@eeb.org

Martina Mlinaric, EEB Senior Policy Officer – Biodiversity, Water and Soil

+32 (0) 2289 1093 or +32 (0) 476 972 050

martina.mlinaric@eeb.org

Elodie Cantaloube, BirdLife Europe Communications Officer

+32 (0)2 541 07 81

elodie.cantaloube@birdlife.org

Carles Carboneras, RSPB (BirdLife UK) Species Policy Officer

Tel. +44 (0)1767 693234 or Mobile. +44 (0)7718 423273

Carles.Carboneras@rspb.org.uk