

Hunting and trapping

On Tuesday, October, 1, 2002, Malta closed negotiations on the vast and sensitive area of the environment. This information note explains the results of negotiations on hunting and trapping.

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At a glance

The European Union and Malta agreed that:

- Bird hunting will continue in Spring.
- Bird hunting at sea will continue from three kilometres off the coast.
- Bird trapping will continue, even in Spring.
- By the end of 2007, Malta will carry out a study to establish how many song-birds may be captured from the wild.
- No new licences for bird trapping be issued before the completion of the study.
- An ORNIS committee be established.



Background on Directive 79/409/EEC

EU law on the protection of wild birds dates back to the 1970s. This law ranks among the first EU environmental laws. Contrary to popular perception, the purpose of this law is not to ban hunting, but to ensure that hunting is sustainable and does not endanger specific species of wild birds. Hunting needs to be regulated and proper enforcement of hunting rules must be ensured. But this does not mean that hunting should be banned. The law therefore seeks to control large scale shooting and capture of birds. It includes annexes with lists of birds that should be protected and others that can be hunted. It also has measures relating to methods of hunting and on trade in birds.

Malta's request during negotiations

During negotiations Malta accepted that it should adopt EU law on the protection of birds. However, Malta argued that within the framework of this law, measures will be taken so that even after membership, the traditional patterns of hunting and trapping which have evolved as a result of Malta's particular biogeographical circumstances will be maintained.

Outcome of negotiations

After intense negotiations, lobbying and consultations, an agreement was finally reached on how the EU law on wild birds should be applied in Malta. The outcome is as follows:

Hunting

In Malta, the two main species that are hunted are turtle-dove and quail. Under EU law, hunting in Spring is normally prohibited to protect birds during migration. During the negotiations Malta declared that it will apply for a derogation from this part of the EU law so that Maltese hunters will continue hunting in Spring for turtledoves and quail. This position was acknowledged by the EU. This means that Maltese hunters will continue to be able to hunt in Spring. In Malta, hunting is also allowed between in Autumn between September and the end of January each year. This season will not be affected in any way after Malta's entry into the EU.

Species that can be hunted: Apart from turtledoves and quail, hunting is also possible on another 30 species, mostly hunted in Autumn. These include the skylark (*alwett*), the song thrush (*malvizz*), the golden plover (*pluviera*) and the woodcock (*gallina*). This too will not be affected and can continue after Malta's entry in the EU. But hunting in Spring will be limited to turtledove and quail, which are the two main species that are hunted at that time of the year.

Hunting at sea: Maltese hunters will still be able to hunt at sea after Malta's membership. However, more enforcement is required to act against illegal practices.

Trapping

Trapping is a traditional method of capturing birds through the use of traditional personally-operated nets. Birds that are trapped are not killed but captured and held in captivity. After membership, Maltese trappers will continue to be able to practice trapping for a number of songbird species. These are: the goldfinch (*gardell*), the green finch (*verdun*), the chaffinch (*sponsun*), the linnet (*gojgin*), the hawfinch (*taż-żebbuġ*), the serin (*apparell*) and the siskin (*ekru*). Traditional trapping will continue to be allowed provided that a number of measures are implemented by 2008:

- First, that a study will be conducted to assess the sustainability of trapping of finches by establishing how many birds may be captured from the wild to maintain genetic diversity of the birds in captivity.
- Secondly, that a full captive breeding system will be established and trappers will be trained on breeding.
- Thirdly, that all trapping sites will be registered.
- And finally, that during this period of study no new trapping licences will be issued. Current licence holders will not be affected.

Enforcement

Malta has long suffered from a less than satisfactory enforcement record, although in recent years more illegal practices were brought to book. Stricter enforcement should bring about more control over illegal practices. This plays in favour not only of better conservation of protected birds, but also in favour of those hunters and trappers who stick to the rules. During negotiations, Malta committed itself to enforcing hunting rules and curbing illegal practices more effectively. It also committed itself to put in place the necessary administrative structures and personnel to be able to do so.

Ornis Committee

As part of the enforcement effort, an Ornis Committee will be set up by the Maltese Government before the end of

2002. The Ornis Committee will include representatives of hunting and environmental organisations. This Committee will decide on important issues relating to the study that needs to be conducted in relation to trapping and on licensing and registration. It will also coordinate the collation of the *carnet de chasse* and it will be able to introduce any necessary controls on hunting and trapping in case of a serious decline in certain species. The Committee may also decide on new species which may be hunted.

Protected species

Bird species which already protected by Maltese law will remain protected after Malta's accession to the EU. Moreover, other birds will also be protected in Spring, except for turtledoves and quail in the case of hunting and except for seven songbirds in the case of trapping.

Malta's official negotiating position paper on this area is also available from MIC or from:

www.mic.org.mt

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