

## **New rules to combat illegal caviar trade**

***New EU rules will help combat illegal trade in caviar, which has seriously reduced sturgeon populations in the Caspian Sea. The rules are at a heart of a new Regulation just adopted by the European Commission. They require that all tins of caviar imported, exported or marketed in the EU bear a specific label certifying that it is legally sourced caviar. All repacking plants handling caviar must be licensed. Other provisions will simplify procedures for CITES-listed pets to be taken outside the EU. The new Commission Regulation overhauls, simplifies and replaces an existing Regulation, thus contributing to Better Regulation. It will become binding in all Member States in a few weeks.***

"The EU is the first major market for caviar to implement the new internationally agreed rules to combat illegal caviar trade," said Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas. "The extent of illegal trade and poaching in the Caspian Sea appears to be huge. The new EU rules should contribute to reducing it and ensuring the survival of wild sturgeon populations. I would urge other consumer countries to adopt similar measures soon."

### **The new rules on caviar trade**

The new rules implement the universal labelling system for caviar introduced under the 1975 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in response to declining sturgeon populations in the Caspian Sea. While a Commission Regulation in place since 2001 requires the labelling of all *large* containers<sup>1</sup> of caviar *imported* into the EU, the new Regulation requires that *all* caviar containers, no matter their size and no matter whether the caviar is imported, re-packaged or to be exported, bear a specific label specifying the source of the caviar and the year of harvest. Moreover, all re-packaging plants for caviar in the EU have to be licensed and registered. Implementation of the new labelling system should help reduce illegal trade and ultimately illegal harvesting.

CITES' labelling system for caviar complements CITES rules applying to exporting countries, which have to agree amongst themselves on annual catch and export quotas based on scientific surveys of the stocks.

In June, the Commission will be hosting a workshop with all relevant consumer and caviar-exporting states in Brussels to discuss ways of combating poaching and illegal trade.

### **Illegal trade in caviar**

The EU is the world's largest importer of caviar. Between 1998 and 2003, the EU legally imported 550 tonnes of caviar, which corresponds to 46% of the total global trade (1,205 tonnes). Russia and Iran are the largest exporters to the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> Tins with over 250gr of caviar, and for smaller tins only the boxes in which they come

Actual amounts of illegal trade are unknown, but estimated to be significant. Between 2000 and 2005, authorities seized over 12 tonnes of illegal caviar in the EU. In its enforcement and assessment work in Caspian Sea states, the CITES Secretariat heard from many sources that levels of poaching far exceed legal harvesting. In some areas, this is believed to range from 5 to 12 fish taken by poachers for every one taken lawfully by licensed fishermen.

### **New provisions for travelling pets**

In line with CITES decisions, the new Regulation also introduces new provisions to facilitate travel of captive-bred pets listed under CITES - such as listed parrots, reptiles, leopards, tortoises and other listed animals - and travelling exhibitions such as circuses. It waives the requirement to apply for new import and export permits at each border crossing. Pet owners will now be able to apply in their country of residence for a certificate allowing multiple border crossings outside the EU.

### **Background**

The new Regulation does not require adoption by the European Parliament and the Council since it was agreed in comitology procedure. It will enter into force on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of its publication in the Official Journal, which should happen within the next couple of weeks. It will be binding and directly applicable in all Member States.

It takes over all provisions of the existing Regulation ((EC) No 1808/2001), which it will replace. However, all of these provisions have been redrafted in order to make the Regulation easier to understand and implement, in line with the Commission's Better Regulation initiative.

Both the old and the new Regulations are *implementing* Regulations and do not affect the basic Regulation implementing CITES in the EU (Regulation (EC) 338/97), which in many ways is stricter than CITES.

CITES regulates imports and exports of some 33,000 animal and plant species. Commercial trade in some 900 most threatened species (Appendix I) is prohibited, and trade in another 32,600 species at risk (Appendix II) is controlled through a permit system. Appendix III lists some 300 species that are protected in at least one country that wishes to control the trade. Since 1998, most commercial species of sturgeon and paddlefish, including Beluga *Huso huso*, have been listed on Appendix II. The introduction of the universal labelling system for caviar was agreed by the Parties to CITES in 2000 and 2002. The Convention currently has 169 Parties including all EU Member States.

For more information about CITES implementation in the EU, visit:  
[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/cites/home\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/cites/home_en.htm)