

Workshop on the illegal importation of wild meat

Brussels, 12th December 2024



Policy recommendations

The trade in illegal wild meat has a negative impact on wild animal populations and ecosystems in the countries of origin and it poses risks to human and animal health in both source and destination countries. Scientific research shows that about 6 million tonnes of wild meat are harvested each year in the Congo basin and the Amazon Basin¹. According to official estimates in Belgium², 3.7 tonnes of bushmeat are illegally imported every month through Brussels Airport, despite regular checks and seizures. In France, for the past five years, customs have seized about 600 kg of illegal wild meat each year³.

Despite a strict prohibition at European Union to import meat in personal consignments of passengers, it remains a challenge for public authorities to grasp the scale of this trafficking and to act effectively against it.

This document presents key recommendations to tackle the illegal importation of wild meat in the European Union, based on French and Belgian national experiences. These recommendations are the result of a cross-border workshop organised in December 2024 where experts of public authorities (including customs officers, veterinary and health border controls agents), scientific institutions, the air transport sector (airports and airlines), civil society and academia exchanged views and experiences. These 10 recommendations aim to provide updated priority actions to feed into national strategies to combat the illegal importation of wild meat:

1. A centralized database on national and European level

A centralized database on illegal wild meat should be developed to facilitate and enhance information sharing between the different actors involved. Ideally, this database should be on the European level. However, a national database would offer a quicker, practical solution.

2. Standardized protocols for sampling

Basic sample procedures should be put in place that border control agents could easily use in an efficient way. The use of sampling procedures could improve detection rates and provide more reliable data.

¹ Nasi, R., Taber, A., & Van Vliet, N. (2011). Empty forests, empty stomachs? Bushmeat and livelihoods in the Congo and Amazon Basins. *The International Forestry Review*, 13(3), 355–368. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24310711>.

² Chaber, A.-L. et al. Report on the illegal importation of meat, including bushmeat, seized at Zaventem airport - 2017/2018. (2018)

³ Baud B., Illegal imports of wild meat in traveller's luggage, Workshop on the illegal importation of wild meat, Bruxelles, 12/12/2024.

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3. Advanced techniques for species identification.

There is a need for a standardized protocol for species identification. It is recommended to invest in procedures with the best advanced scientific technique such as fast DNA-identification.

4. Enhanced biosafety for personnel

A biosafety protocol with appropriate personal protection material and biosafety training would decrease the risk of airport personnel and border control agents to potential pathogens.

5. A comprehensive and balanced penalty system

A national legislation should be put in place that provides a comprehensive and balanced penalty system that includes non CITES wild meat. Any person who brings illegal meat into the country would be punishable. It is also crucial to engage with the judiciary and the public prosecutors to reflect on legal pending issues (notably recidivism).

6. Simplifying applicable EU law

Applicable European legislation that imposes a ban on the importation of meat in passenger's luggage (*Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2122 of 10 October 2019*) needs to be simplified. Currently, there are too many exceptions as regards certain categories of goods exempted from official controls such as for fishery products (<20kg), which makes the fieldwork for controls very complex and more difficult to execute. It is proposed to remove all exceptions that are currently in force.

7. Training programs for air transport staff and enhanced resources from public authorities and civil society organisations

In order to improve awareness of air transport staff and to enhance communication and coordination between the air transport sector, public authorities and civil society organisations, access to or development of “ready-to-use” and “targeted” (e.g. crew- vs. ground staff-specific) materials is needed.

8. An harmonized EU approach across the aviation sector

Inconsistent procedures across member states poses challenges. Standardized practices, greater cooperation, and a cross-disciplinary approach—led by organizations like the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)—are needed to align policies and elevate the issue of wildlife trafficking across the aviation sector by setting standards.

9. Need to outreach with destination countries

Clear communication with source countries is essential to clarify regulations, supported by coordinated resources and, ideally, an EU-wide approach. The establishment of an interministerial national working group that has the mandate to reach out with destination countries, including at the level of foreign affairs, is critical in engaging with source countries

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effectively. Bilateral agreements and streamlined communication through a single EU civil aviation spokesperson could enhance collaboration.

10. Amending Annex 9 of the ICAO Chicago convention

The ICAO is governed by the Chicago convention which sets the framework for international air transport and is composed of 19 annexes containing international standards and recommended practices. Annex 9 primarily focuses on the facilitation of international air transport, which involves the movement of aircraft, passengers, crews and cargo across international borders, with respect to the requirements of customs, immigration, public health and agriculture authorities. While Annex 9 contains provisions to combat illegal wild trafficking, several issues remain with its implementation. Amending parts of Annex 9 related to wild life trafficking, informed by public and private sector recommendations, would help set new industry standards that will influence source countries.