

Intergroup  
SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES  
Intergroupe  
CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES  
Intergruppe  
NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN  
Intergruppo  
CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI  
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**Meeting of 14.12.2005**

**Invasive alien species and their impact on biodiversity in the EU**

**MEPs**

BACO, Peter (NA, Sk)	LEHTINEN, Lasse (PES, Fin)
DOYLE, Avril (EPP-ED, Ir)	NAVARRO, Robert (PES, Fr)
EBNER, Michl (EPP-ED, It)	PURVIS, John (EPP-ED, Uk)
GOUDIN, Hélène (IND/DEM, Sw)	SCHIERHUBER, Agnes (EPP-ED, At)
HELMER, Roger (NA, UK)	SEPPÄNEN, Esko (GUE/NGL, Fin)
KARAS, Othmar (EPP-ED, At)	

*Represented*

CHMIELEWSKI, Zdzislaw (EPP-ED, Pl)  
PEK, Bogdan (IND/DEM, Pl)

*Apologised*

BUSQUIN, Phillipe (PES, Be)  
LULLING, Astrid (EPP-ED, Lux)

**Experts / Observers**

BARNES, Miles (ESI)	KAPPEL, Jan (EAA)
BOSTEELS, Jean-Louis (FACE Be)	de TURCKHEIM, Gilbert (FACE)
KENDALL, Andrew (ESI)	VESTERGAARD, Ms (EAA)

**Assistants**

CABALLÉ, Guy (R. NAVARRO)	MATYSIAK, Marcin (B. PEK)
DOMISCH, Mika (L. LEHTINEN)	MICH, Paola (M. EBNER)
HUHTANIEMI, Hannes (P-N. KAUPPI / ELO)	ZARYCHTA, Kamila (Z.CHMIELEWSKI)

**Secretariat**

ESPÁRRAGO, Manuel (FACE)  
LECOCQ, Yves (FACE)  
von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)

## 1. Opening remarks and introduction

M. EBNER, President-Coordinator of the Intergroup, opens the meeting and welcomes all MEPs present or represented, as well as the invited speakers, experts and guests. He informs Members that the Intergroup *Bureau* adopted at its meeting of 1.12.2005 the work programme and the main topics for the year 2006. However, if Members wish to propose any special or urgent topic, he will try to include them in the work programme. The *Bureau* will meet again in June 2006.

## 2. Invasive alien species (IAS)

The chair of the meeting is handed over to L. LETHINEN, Co-President of the Intergroup, who introduces the different speakers.

A. KENDALL, of the *European Squirrel Initiative* (ESI), makes an introduction to the problem of invasive alien species (IAS), which represent a significant component of global environmental change caused by humans. In fact, invasion by alien species constitutes one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, clearly illustrated by the ongoing expansion of the American Grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* and the American mink *Mustela vison*, which are driving many populations of native European Red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* and European mink *Mustela lutreola* to extinction. IAS can also cause serious losses to agriculture, forestry (namely by Grey squirrel) and aquaculture and may even represent a threat to human health.

Regarding the legal context, he points out that the *UN Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) requires “to eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species”. Similar provisions exist in the *EU Habitats Directive* and in the Council of Europe’s *Bern Convention*. However, he insists on the need to increase public awareness and to include the problem of IAS in the political agenda.

Finally, A. KENDALL mentions the recently created DAISIE project (*Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe*), supported by the European Commission and aiming at detecting IAS, preventing their spread and creating an European inventory of aquatic and terrestrial IAS.

On behalf of FACE, M. ESPARRAGO points out that the EU has no specific legislation on IAS, although the “Birds” and “Habitats” Directives and the CITES Regulation include provisions to deal directly or indirectly with this issue. The EU also supports, through the LIFE financial instrument, projects aimed at protecting NATURA 2000 sites from IAS.

The Council of Europe has been more active in tackling the problem of IAS. Its 1979 BERN Convention requires Contracting Parties “to strictly control the introduction of non-native species”. The Committee of Ministers adopted in 1984 a specific Recommendation to interpret this obligation, and since 1992 a Group of Experts on IAS collects information, proposes harmonisation of national regulations, lists species whose introduction is undesirable and identifies the authorities responsible for import permits and the conditions for issuing them.

To provide an integrated response to this issue, the Council of Europe adopted in 2003 a *European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species*, with a three-step approach. The first one is prevention, which is the most environmentally desirable and cost-effective strategy, eliminating the problem at its very origin; to achieve this, surveillance and an efficient early warning system are required. When prevention has failed, eradication is the best management option, aiming at the complete removal of the alien species soon after its introduction; therefore, an early detection and a rapid response are needed. Finally, if eradication is no longer feasible, it is still possible to restrict or mitigate the spread of the exotic species to neighbouring areas, through its containment within a geographical boundary and/or its long-term control, by reducing the population density under an acceptable threshold.

The *Strategy* also seeks to increase awareness among the public at large of the risks of IAS and also calls on national authorities to collect, manage and share information and to strengthen their legal and institutional frameworks.

The BERN Convention has also taken a case-by case approach. Its Standing Committee monitors the correct implementation of the Convention through a “case-file system”, in most cases following a complaint from a NGO. In this context, a number of Recommendations have been adopted (e.g. on the Grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* or the Ruddy duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*).

M. BARNES, Chairman of the *European Squirrel Initiative* (ESI), makes a presentation about the Grey squirrel, a very problematic and fast-increasing IAS.

This species was introduced back in 1876 in the UK. Unlike the condition of its natural habitat in North America, the mild winters and the absence of natural competition and of virtually any natural predator in the UK caused the rapid expansion of the Grey squirrel. Forestry damage caused by this species was a major source of concern for landowners, but all attempts to control the species have failed so far. ESI considers that, taking as reference the expansion over the last 60 years, by the year in 2025 the whole of Britain will be invaded by the Grey squirrel and the native Red squirrel will be extinct.

The Grey squirrel has also been introduced in Northern Italy and there is now a serious risk that it will spread to other countries, eventually bringing the Red squirrel to extinction throughout Europe. Therefore, a prompt action is required to avoid this expansion, as the Council of Europe has recently indicated in one of its Recommendations.

Due to its population density (800 Grey squirrels / 100 ha), behaviour patterns and voracity, the Grey squirrel also causes major damage to forestry, with over forty tree species being affected. Grey squirrels may now damage the next generation of trees and change the landscape over the next 150 years turning tall wood into tall scrub. The impact on forestry also represents a threat for many breeding birds, which see their nests attacked.

ESI considers that the removal of the Grey squirrel is the only solution. Therefore, it is important to facilitate the resumption of research to find and test a publicly acceptable method for eradication (such as immuno-contraception). It is also necessary to increase awareness at both national and European level about the threat posed by this species and the need to eradicate it. He reminds that IUCN (= World Conservation Union) has listed the Grey squirrel as one of the 100 worst IAS in the world.

M. BARNES ends his intervention asking MEPs to put pressure on the Italian government to eliminate Grey squirrels in its territory and on the Commission for funding the research of a non-lethal method for the removal of the species from Italy, Ireland and the UK.

A. DOYLE has the impression that the existing EU legal framework cannot do much to address the problem of IAS. She asks if greater use of the BERN Convention might be a solution and how eradication could be achieved.

M. BARNES informs that the Italian Ministry of Environment advised the regional authorities of the Ticino Valley to take action to eradicate the Grey squirrel but the action was sabotaged by the animal rights movement. More international pressure would be helpful to solve this problem, especially from the neighbour countries. With regard to the eradication method, he is of the opinion that it should be possible to find a method of immuno-contraception for Grey squirrels, which afterwards could be used for other pest species.

M. EBNER asks what the British and Irish governments have done so far.

A. DOYLE informs that the Irish Ministry of Agriculture is funding a project for protecting Red squirrel as well as broadleaf trees from Grey squirrel attacks.

L. LETHINEN expresses his belief that Italy and Ireland could be saved from the problem but that the case of the UK already seems to be hopeless.

R. HELMER praises the action undertaken by the Irish government. This contrasts with the inaction of the British government to avoid the spreading of some species, mainly because it is afraid of criticism from animal rights activists.

A. DOYLE wonders if immuno-contraception is possible without disturbing the Red squirrel and how targeted it can be used.

L. LEHTINEN recommends an Intergroup Resolution on this issue, which is welcomed by the auditory, and thanks the experts for their presentations.

(A Draft Resolution, prepared by the Secretariat, is included at the end of these minutes.)

### **3. Any other business**

No issues are raised under this agenda item.

### **4. Next meeting**

The next meeting, to be chaired by Mrs. L. EK, is scheduled for **15<sup>th</sup> February 2006** and should mainly deal with the management of large carnivores.

L. LEHTINEN thanks all participants, wishes them the best for the New Year and closes the meeting.

Manuel ESPARRAGO  
Max von STEYNITZ

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## ***Draft***

### *Resolution on invasive alien species*

Following their meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> December 2005 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, MEPs, Members of the *Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity & Countryside Activities* Intergroup:

- Note that invasive alien species represent one of the major threats to biodiversity, second only to habitat destruction, and also cause severe damages to forestry and agriculture;
- Underline that the further spread of invasive alien species will lead to the decline and even the extinction of many native European species;
- Call on the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, to follow the example of the Council of Europe and adopt an integrated policy on invasive alien species, aiming first at preventing their introduction, secondly at eradicating them when prevention fails and thirdly at restricting their spread when eradication is not feasible;
- Highlight the threat posed by the American Grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* for the survival of the European Red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*, request a ban on the keeping of, trade in, translocation of, release into the wild of and importation of Grey squirrels, ask for funding to develop a humane and effective method of eradication and urge the Italian authorities to eradicate this species from Northern Italy, in particular from the Ticino Valley, according to the Recommendations of the Council of Europe.