



Three men summonsed by The National Parks & Wildlife Service for the illegal hunting and possession of protected White Clawed Crayfish

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Two men, Mr. Scaletchi Dumitru of Bettystown, Co. Meath, and Mr. Veaceslav Verdes, of 51 Bathe Abbey, Duleek, Co. Meath, appeared before Dundalk District Court on Tuesday, December 15th, charged under the Wildlife Acts of illegal hunting and possessing three hundred and forty-five live, and five dead White Clawed Crayfish. The species is legally protected by the Irish Wildlife Acts and listed on Annex II and Annex V of the European Habitats Directive. The offense took place at the Grand Canal at Baronrath Bridge, Ardclough, Co. Kildare, on June 30th, 2019. The case was taken by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), through State Solicitor Liam Keane. Outlining the facts of the case to Judge Erinn McKiernan, NPWS Conservation Ranger Kieran Buckley told the Court, the defendants were caught with two buckets full of crayfish. All of the live crayfish were later released back into the Grand Canal unharmed.

Mr. Buckley told the Judge that White-clawed Crayfish is considered a globally threatened species. Ireland has an international responsibility because it remains the only part of the EU with no introduced alien invasive crayfish species. Due to the numbers in the defendants' possession, the prosecution case represented the most significant intervention to protect White Clawed Crayfish by the state. The Judge was told that fifty percent of the illegal catch was probably breeding females. Mr. Buckley to the Court that if the NPWS had not detected the crime and intervened, the accused's actions could have resulted in a potential loss of thousands of juvenile White Clawed Crayfish because there would have been a complete breeding failure of all the females in the caught sample.

The accused admitted under caution they had planned to release the crayfish they had caught into a lake. The Court heard that this action would have posed a significant threat to the receiving population if that had materialized. He said that the scientific consensus is clear any movement of White-clawed Crayfish from one water body to another is a principal causal factor driving the spread of the deadly Crayfish Plague. This disease is extremely virulent; it had already eradicated previously known populations in Lough Lene and Lough White.

Under cross-examination by the defence solicitor Mr. Paddy Goodwin, Mr. Buckley was asked if he knew the defendants had poor English. However, the Court also heard that the prosecutions' case included photographic evidence of warning signs in ten languages besides the canal where the offenses took place. He was then asked if he knew that hunting crayfish was an acceptable practice in Moldova. Mr. Buckley said that he had no knowledge of the Moldovan laws but added that hunting or the possession of White Clawed Crayfish is illegal in Ireland.

Judge McKiernan found the facts of the case proven and accepted by the Court. She awarded expenses to the state, applied the probation act, and said that if each defendant made a charitable donation of €1,000 to the Red Door Project and Turas before February 16th, a criminal conviction would not be recorded. Failing that, she would record a criminal conviction and impose a fine. Judge Mc Kiernan issued a bench warrant for the arrest of a third person who did not appear before the Court. He was also summonsed for hunting and possession of the White-clawed Crayfish.

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/heritage/national-parks-and-wildlife/three-men-summonsed-national-parks-wildlife-service-illegal>