

Men charged for possession of 345 white-clawed crayfish, a protected species

The judge was told that 50% of the illegal catch was probably breeding females, which could have had a huge impact on the crayfish population.

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Part of the haul of over 300 illegally caught white-clawed crayfish seized by the NPWS.

TWO MEN HAVE been asked to make a €1,000 charitable donation after being charged under the Wildlife Acts of illegal hunting and possessing 345 live, and five dead, [white-clawed crayfish](#), which are a protected species under the Irish Wildlife Acts.

Scaletchi Dumitru of Bettystown, Co Meath, and Veaceslav Verdes, of 51 Bathe Abbey, Duleek, Co Meath, appeared before Dundalk District Court yesterday.

The animal is common in many lakes and rivers in limestone districts, and is an important species ecologically – both as a grazer of plants and as an otter's favourite food.

The case was taken by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), through State solicitor Liam Keane.

Court appearance

NPWS Conservation Ranger Kieran Buckley told Judge Erinn McKiernan that on 30 June 2019, the defendants were caught with two buckets full of crayfish.

The offense took place at the Grand Canal at Baronrath Bridge, Ardclough, Co Kildare.

All of the live crayfish were later released back into the Grand Canal unharmed.

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 50% of the illegal catch was probably breeding females. Buckley told 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.



Source: NWPS

Defence

The accused admitted under caution they had planned to release the crayfish they had caught into a lake, and not the Grand Canal.

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.

Cross examination

Under cross-examination by the defence solicitor Paddy Goodwin, Buckley was asked if he knew the defendants had poor English.

The Court 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. Buckley said that he had no knowledge of the Moldavan 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 (an addiction service) and Turas (a welfare-to-work programme) before 16 February, a criminal conviction would not be recorded.

Failing that, she would record a criminal conviction and impose a fine.

Judge McKiernan 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.

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<https://www.thejournal.ie/white-clawed-crayfish-court-5303648-Dec2020/>