



ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL "NETWORK" RELATED TO COMBATING WILDLIFE CRIME IN CROATIA

STUDY ON THE ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN CAPACITIES, TIME FRAME AND FINANCIAL COSTS NECESSARY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND CONTINUOUS OPERATION OF THE "NETWORK" IN CROATIA

SUMMARY

In the Republic of Croatia, the jurisdiction for the detection and prosecution of punishable acts against protected wild species (wildlife crime) is clearly legally and institutionally defined. State and public bodies that are actually and spatially responsible for this type of crime are precisely determined, but the expected effects and results are still absent. First of all, a very small number of misdemeanors and crimes are detected. Even in those cases that have been prosecuted, there is no serious effect of sanctions on perpetrators, both in the special-preventive and in the general-preventive sense. For various reasons, there are no concrete preventive activities and programs aimed at combating this type of crime, both within individual competent authorities and through coordinated joint activities. Given the above, it is indicated that it is necessary to consider new models that would contribute to increasing efficiency. One of the possible models is the establishment of a national network for combating wildlife crime that would unite all relevant entities involved in combating this type of crime and encourage them to act even stronger through better sensitization of competent stakeholders, better communication and cooperation, solving specific problems, greater detection activity, more effective prosecution and stronger prevention of this type of crime.

The network can be seen as a multidisciplinary advisory body whose formation would not initially require additional legislation. Mutual cooperation could be regulated by a joint agreement between state bodies and public institutions, stakeholders. The national network would also have the necessary operational power stemming from the specific powers of individual stakeholders to combat wildlife crime. In the later stages of development, depending on the success of the realization of the set goals and tasks, the network could be included in the relevant legal and subordinate regulations (for example, the Nature Protection Act) at the initiative of stakeholders.

In this way, the necessary preconditions would be created for planning the necessary budgetary resources to achieve the objectives of the national network. The national network should not

have its own special employees but should consist of employees of existing state bodies and public institutions. For the establishment and functioning of the network, the existing resources of the competent authorities would be mainly sufficient. Due to the different levels of authority and competence of individual stakeholders of the national network, it would not be suitable for sharing operational information in specific cases through network communication channels, but this type of communication would take place as before, in direct official communication of the competent state authorities. The national network should not engage in operational work in specific cases but would continue to be left to individual network stakeholders in accordance with their legal competencies.

The initial general objectives of the national network may be considered to be: 1. The creation of a national reference point for combating wildlife crime, linking the best competent experts dealing with this field; 2. Achieving synergistic impact between competent authorities, mutual encouragement, assistance, sensitization, guidance, and counseling; 3. Upgrading and exchanging the necessary knowledge and experience among network stakeholders; 4. Improving communication between competent authorities; 5. Increasing the number of punishable acts detected and prosecution efficiency; 6. Strengthening the prevention of committing wildlife crime.

The main tasks of the national network:

- monitoring the status and trend of wildlife crimes;
- a joint analysis of good and bad practices;
- adopting recommendations on standards of good practice and recommendations for avoiding bad practices; adoption of protocols of conduct;
- mutual informing/communication between stakeholders of the national network;
- encouraging and organizing education; encouraging specialization and strengthening professional capacities within existing state bodies and public institutions;
- analyzing and proposing amendments to legislation relating to the suppression of wildlife crime;
- organizing and conducting campaigns that will have the role of sensitizing the professional and general public about the problem of wildlife crime;
- participation in international cooperation in the field of combating wildlife crime; encouraging and organizing joint and individual actions aimed at detecting punishable actions;
- encouraging and organizing joint coordinated preventive actions in a specific area.

Considering the scope of work, the coordinating role of the network could be taken over by the relevant Ministry (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, hereinafter: MINGOR), with its internal organizational units, the Nature Protection Directorate and/or the Institute for Environmental and Nature Protection. Within this organizational unit, it would be necessary to



designate the department(s) and specific civil servants who will lead the project of establishing a national network.

It can be concluded that it would be more effective in the initiative and initial stages of establishing a national network to form only a national level, and then, depending on the development and needs of the network, form regional or even local branches. It would therefore be justified to consider the concept of a less numerous but operationally efficient network at the beginning of its formation. Competent authorities should designate their representatives, at least two representatives from each authority in order to ensure continuity and replacement.

The national network should, in a narrow sense, consist of permanent representatives of the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia, the Nature Protection Directorate and the Institute for Environmental and Nature Protection of the relevant Ministry - MINGOR, the State Inspectorate (Sector for the Supervision in the field of Environmental Protection, Nature Protection and Water), the Police (especially the Criminal Police Directorate, the Public Order Directorate and the Border Directorate, of the Police Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior), customs, Croatian Coast Guard, courts.

In accordance with the needs, at the initiative of stakeholders of the national network, representatives of relevant educational and scientific institutions can also be included as permanent or occasional members. A significant feature of the establishment of a national network would be that its establishment and functioning do not require significant financial costs. Given that the suppression of wildlife crime falls within the regular scope of work of all stakeholders of the national network, financing is provided from the budget funds of the Republic of Croatia. Therefore, the engagement of civil servants and judicial officials should not be shown as additional costs. The only noticeable constant cost could occur in the relevant Ministry through the engagement of two employees who would spend approximately 30% of their working time on a weekly basis supporting the establishment of a national network, while this engagement in terms of analytical and administrative support would be even lower.