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WWF Norge
Kristian Augusts gt. 7A
Postboks 6784
St. Olavs Plass
0130 Oslo

Tel: 22 03 65 00
Fax: 22 20 06 66
info@wwf.no
www.wwf.no
www.panda.org

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
393, Saint Jacques Street, suite 300
Montreal,
Quebec,
H2Y 1N9
Canada

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CC:

Erik Solheim, Minister of Environment
Lisbeth Berg-Hansen, Minister of Fisheries
Directorate of Nature Management
Directorate of Fisheries
Institute of Marine Research

Request for action from the CBD-secretariat:

Norwegian management of the invasive king crab violates UN Convention on Biological Diversity

WWF is deeply concerned by the Norwegian king crab management, the spread of the crab along the Norwegian coast and the dramatic effects on Norwegian ecosystems, and urges CBD to take action. WWF encourages CBD and Norwegian authorities to make a joint Review of Norwegian management of Alien and Invasive Species with the aim to give clear recommendations for improved and more effective and coherent management, including the management of the king crab. WWF recommends that such a review also includes the views of non-governmental stakeholders.

The king crab is an alien invasive species in Norwegian waters. Despite this, Norwegian management policy for the species has been targeted at building the population to a size where the species can be harvested with maximal economic yield. Concern over the long term effects of this policy within one of the world's most productive marine ecosystems is growing. WWF-Norway has for several years been working to get the Norwegian government to implement required measures to reduce the population and limit the further spread of the king crab, including a strategic eradication plan.

Scientists are now warning of alarming effects on Norwegian benthic ecosystems, including predation on lumpsucker and possibly capelin eggs, which in the long run may have dramatic consequences for the recruitment. It has also been shown that the crab alters the composition and structure of benthic communities, and is a possible vector for spreading lethal cod parasites. It is still uncertain how far west and south the crab will spread along the Norwegian coast. It has already reached the Tromsø-area, and individuals have been found as far southwest as the Lofoten area and as far out to sea as 100



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nautical miles north of North Cape. King crab larvae spend about 2-3 months living in the water masses and can be transported over long distances with the ocean currents. It is thus not unlikely that the crab might eventually spread to Svalbard. There is still not sufficient knowledge about the ecological and economical consequences of the king crab. Acquiring this knowledge requires substantial amounts of research over long time periods and it may take decades before we know the full extent. By this time it will probably be too late to initiate countermeasures. We cannot wait until we know the full extent of the consequences – we must act now!

However, the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries is still not implementing the required measures to reduce the further spread, and the king crab population is continuously spreading to new fiord areas and along the coast. There is now also a proposal for stopping all commercial fishing, in the regulated area East of 26°, which will contribute to additional recruitment and spread of the population. The Convention on Biological Diversity clearly recognizes the threat that introduced invasive species constitute toward biodiversity. Article 8(h) of the Convention states that *“Contracting Parties to the Convention should, as far as possible and appropriate, prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species”*.

Management in violation also with Norwegian regulations

The king crab management is in direct violation of the Norwegian Marine Resource Act § 7 Principle of Regulation (*“Forvaltningsprinsippet”*), which clearly requires a precautionary approach, an ecosystem based management that protects habitat and biodiversity, and an efficient resource control.

The king crab management is also a violation of the Nature Diversity Act. The key principles that are to be used as a basis for the exercise of authority include among others knowledge-based management, precautionary principle and assessment of cumulative environmental effects. Decisions affecting the environment are to be based on scientific knowledge on population numbers, natural habitats and the ecological state of the species, as well as the effect of implemented measures. In addition, the Nature Diversity Act also provides rules for better control of introduction of alien species. There are provisions to eradicate, contain or control alien species that are a threat to the natural flora or fauna or other important public interests. These rules apply irrespective of how the organisms in question entered the Norwegian environment. Among other things, a duty of due care applies to any person who releases organisms or who initiates activities that may result in the spread or release of alien organisms.

The king crab is listed as a high risk alien species on the Norwegian Black List of introduced species (Artsdatabanken 2007), imploring the government to implement systematic control and if possible eradication.

Conclusion

WWF-Norway has for several years been working to get the Norwegian government to implement measures to reduce and control the population and limit the further spread of the king crab. In The Year of Biodiversity it is deeply concerning that Norway is still disregarding its international obligations to protect biodiversity and reduce the threats from introduced species.



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The Norwegian management of the invasive king crab constitutes a clear violation of the CBD, in particular its article 8h and its guiding principles. WWF-Norway urges the CBD-secretariat to take this issue further within the relevant bodies of the CBD and that a statement can be made to urge Norwegian Authorities to revise their policy in light of their international obligations.

If you require any additional information on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

Rasmus Hansson
Secretary General

Nina Jensen
Conservation Director

