



Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis
Commissioner of Health and food safety
European Commission
Department of Health and Food safety
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subject **Request for actions to save European salamanders and newts**

February 25, 2016

Dear Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis,

We would like your attention to a new and critical threat to European salamanders: the fungus ***Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans (Bsal)***. We urge you to undertake action to prevent the extinction of European salamanders and newts.

Almost 40 species of salamanders and newts live in Europe. Some of these are widespread all over the continent, others have very restricted ranges (for example on some islands in the Mediterranean, or some parts of the Alps or the Pyrénées). These endemic species are very prone to becoming extinct.

Recently scientists discovered a pathogenic fungus *B. salamandrivorans*, which originated in Asia. This fungus causes a lethal skin disease and has brought the population of Fire Salamander in the Netherlands to near extinction (99.9% of the population died between 2008 and 2015 due to this disease). Bsal-infected salamanders were also discovered in Germany and Belgium. Laboratory experiments have shown that most of our newts and salamanders species are just as sensitive to this fungus as the Fire Salamander.

The disease can spread quickly and its impact will be enormous. A number of European **salamanders and newts could become extinct within 25 to 50 years, due to Bsal.**

The European Union is obliged to take all necessary measures to preserve its indigenous salamander and newt species based on the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Most salamander and newts species in Europe are protected by the Bern Convention and under the Habitat Directive.

At the latest meeting of the standing committee of the Bern Convention in December 2015, a recommendation was approved concerning Bsal. The contracting parties are strongly recommended, to develop emergency action plans to avoid species extinctions; to invest in research in biology and mitigation of the disease; to set up monitoring programs and to impose trade restrictions as a preventive measure.

This recommendation is a strong signal for the involved parties to take the issue seriously and to take action. Most of the suggested actions can be carried out by adding Bsal to the list of diseases of Union concern, assembled in the animal health legislation.

We ask for the immediate implementation of this recommendation and for the listing of Bsal as a pathogen of Union concern under the animal health regulation.

As species protection, is under the authority of DG Environment, this letter was also send to Commissioner Karmenu Vella, Commissioner of Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

For more information, please visit: www.natuurpunt.be/salamanderdisease.

Hoping for a positive reaction,

Yours sincerely,

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CEO Natuurpunt (Belgium)

Philippe Funcken
CEO Natagora (Belgium)

This letter is an initiative from the following NGO's and scientists.

Natuurpunt (Belgium), Natagora (Belgium), Ravon (Holland), Birdlife Europe (All Europe), Chelonia international (All Europe), SEH Societas Europaea Herpetologica (All Europe), WWF Europe (All Europe), Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (UK), Asociación Herpetológica Española (Spain), British Herpetological Society (UK), Bufo (France), Chelonia Romania (Romania), Froglife (UK), KARCH (Switzerland), Montenegrin Ecologists Society (Montenegro), Nabu (Germany), Natur&ëmwelt (Luxembourg), Österreichische Gesellschaft für Herpetologie (Austria), Põhjakonn (Estonia), Sicona (Luxembourg), Societas Herpetologica Italica (Italia), Societas Herpetologica Slovenica (Slovénia), Société Herpétologique de France (France), The Herpetological Society of Ireland (Ireland), WWF Belgium (Belgium), Zoological Society of London / Institute of Zoology (UK), Amphibian Survival Alliance (World).

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