



**Large Carnivore  
Initiative for Europe**  
IUCN/SSC SPECIALIST GROUP



**Ohrid, 06 October 2023**

**to**

**The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia**

**Statement of the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE)**  
**The management of problem bears in the Mavrovo  
National Park in Northern Macedonia**

**Background**

At the LCIE plenary meeting in Ohrid in North. Macedonia (03-05 October 2023), in the discussion on the status of large carnivores in the country, the members became acquainted with the current situation with problem bears in Mavrovo NP. The bears have apparently been feeding frequently on garbage within villages and close to houses and even forcing entry into buildings. Apparently, all the recommended applied measures (like removal of garbage and chasing) have failed to stop several bears from repeatedly coming to the centre of local village.

The prompt action of relevant authorities is expected from local inhabitants.

**Management options**

In the given circumstances, the removal of those bears from the site seems to be the only option. In theory, the bears could be removed a) to a captive facility, b) translocated and released somewhere else, or c) lethally.

The LCIE strongly discourages the first two options. Adult free-living bears would poorly adapt to even a state of the art holding facility, which is anyhow not available. Translocation would result in moving the problem animals to other areas, simply exporting the problem. Also, brown bears are known to return to their original capture location over distances of hundreds of kilometers. Therefore, lethal removal remains the only viable and practical solution.

Local authorities believe that the legal status of protected species like brown bears makes the lethal removal impossible. Brown bears are listed as a specially protected species in Appendix II of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. This means that, in principle, their killing and capture is to be prohibited. However, under Article 9 of the Convention, individual bears may be killed (or otherwise removed from the wild population) when, (1) this is in the interest of public safety (or another purpose mentioned in Article 9); (2) there is no other satisfactory solution to secure public safety, i.e., other methods of protecting public safety from the

bear(s) involved have been tried to no avail, or are otherwise unavailable; and (3) the removal of the bear(s) in question is not detrimental to the survival of the bear population concerned. In the circumstances at hand, it would appear that all three conditions have been met. Regarding the third condition, it should be noted that, generally speaking, the removal of individual 'problem bears' can be considered to improve the long-term prospects of the conservation of the bear population in question by reducing conflicts and preventing a deterioration of public tolerance. In summary, it would appear that the removal of the bear(s) involved, whether lethal or otherwise, is in conformity with the obligations of the Republic of North Macedonia under the Bern Convention.

In conclusion, the LCIE recommend the following course of action. Firstly, we strongly recommend immediate action to remove the problem bears that are currently posing a danger to public safety. Secondly we recommend that the authorities rapidly begin to invest in conflict prevention actions by introducing bear proof garbage bins and ensuring that garbage and other attractants are removed. Thirdly, we recommend that the authorities invest in the training and equipping of emergency teams that can respond to such episodes rapidly in the future. Early intervention can prevent these conflicts escalating to levels where intervention of this form is less likely to be necessary.

*The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe is a Specialist Group of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission*

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Boitani', written in a cursive style.

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