

## Meeting of the Malta Ornis Committee

Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019, WBRU, MESDC, Sta Venera  
1500 - 1630

### Minutes

#### Participants:

Dr Joseph Grech – Chairman  
Mr Richard Lia – Secretary  
Ms Maria Attard – Representative of the Environment and Resources Authority  
Mr Nicholas Barbara – BirdLife (Malta)  
Mr Marco Falzon – Member nominated by Government  
Mr Lino Farrugia – FKNK  
Mr Horace Micallef – Member nominated by Government  
Mr Joe Perici Calascione – FKNK  
Mr Mark Sultana – BirdLife (Malta)  
Mr Mark Gauci – Avifauna Expert  
Mr Joseph Tabone – Member nominated by Government  
Mr Frank Vassallo – Hunting and live-capturing expert

#### 1. Approval of the agenda

1.1 The agenda was approved.

#### 2. Matters arising and matters to report

- 2.1 Mark Sultana gave a copy of the *State of common European breeding birds 2018*, published by the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS), to all Committee Members. The Secretary informed the Committee that the data published in PECBMS's brochure was presented to the members when the latest update on the conservation status of Turtle-dove was presented by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU).
- 2.2 Nicholas Barbara asked whether WBRU has information on the number of Maltese and Gozitan applicants who applied for a spring hunting special licence. The Secretary informed the Committee that out of a total of 7,647 applicants, 6,395 reside in Malta and 1,252 reside in Gozo. The Secretary also informed the Committee that both the Administrative Law Enforcement and Gozo Police were immediately informed of the respective number of applicants following closure of the spring hunting licence application period in view of the statutory minimum enforcement deployment, as specified in the spring hunting framework regulations (S.L. 549.57<sup>1</sup>).
- 2.3 Regarding WBRU's survey on the number of live specimens of Golden Plovers and Song-thrushes kept by hunters, Lino Farrugia suggested an additional survey to be carried out closer to the date when a follow-up bilateral meeting with the European Commission is held, stating that this would provide a more up-to-date snapshot of the number of Golden Plovers and Song-thrushes kept by hunters due to mortality. The Secretary explained that a snap-shot of the quantity recorded during the survey carried out during the spring hunting licence application period (25 February – 9 March 2019) and a snap-shot taken a few months later would not make any significant difference. Moreover, the Secretary pointed out that neither

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<sup>1</sup> S.L. 549.57: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11570&l=1>

the Birds Directive nor the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations impose restrictions on the number of live-decoys of huntable species that can be used by hunters. Lino Farrugia added that FKNK is concerned that the information requested by the European Commission could lead to some form of restriction or other, as has happened with another Member State when it was asked to distribute the current live-decoys with hunters instead of live-capturing them.

### **3. Approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 20/03/2019**

3.1 The Secretary informed the Committee that Lino Farrugia and Mark Sultana submitted a few amendments to the previously-circulated draft minutes. The Committee took note and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved, as amended.

### **4. FKNK's report and brief proposing lifting of moratorium (GN 538-2016<sup>2</sup>, dated 27 May 2016), application of derogation permitting hunting of European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) during spring 2019 and request to initiate discussions with European Commission for a long-term solution**

4.1 The Secretary asked whether all members had time to go through FKNK's Report that was previously circulated. All members confirmed that they had read FKNK's Report. Lino Farrugia asked whether the Committee would agree to include FKNK's Report *Traditional Turtle Dove Hunting in Spring on the Maltese Islands – Lifting of the Moratorium* as Annex to the minutes of the previous meeting. The Committee agreed. Mark Sultana requested to confirm whether FKNK's request is to recommend to Government to initiate discussions with the European Commission. Lino Farrugia replied that FKNK's request is twofold, namely FKNK's proposal to open a spring hunting season for Turtle-dove from 15 April to 30 April 2019 and FKNK's recommendation to government to initiate discussions with the European Commission to find a long-term solution to the issue of Turtle-dove hunting in spring.

4.2 Nicholas Barbara and Mark Sultana stated that they do not believe it is within the remit of the Ornis Committee to recommend to government to initiate discussions with the European Commission. Lino Farrugia and Joe Perici Calascione provided an overview of the situation in relation to hunting of Turtle-dove in nine other Member States in autumn, stating that these nine Member States objected to a moratorium on hunting of this species, notwithstanding the millions of Turtle-doves that they hunt in comparison with the very limited number hunted in Malta.

4.3 The Chairman requested the Committee to split the vote into two: the first vote on FKNK's proposal for a spring hunting season on Turtle-dove this spring and the other on FKNK's recommendation for discussions between the government and the European Commission for a long-term solution.

4.4 Mark Gauci questioned whether it makes sense for the Committee to vote for a spring hunting season for Turtle-dove this spring followed by a vote in relation to discussions with the European Commission. Joe Perici Calascione remarked that irrespective whether a season for Turtle-dove would open or not this spring, FKNK still recommends that government discusses the issue of spring hunting of Turtle-dove with the European Commission to avoid any litigation procedures and to find a long-term, as opposed to a short-term, solution to this issue. Mark Sultana nonetheless reiterated that if a season for Turtle-dove is opened, the European Commission would invariably communicate with Malta, irrespective of Ornis

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<sup>2</sup> G.N. No. 538/2016: <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Government%20Gazette/Government%20Notices/Pages/2016/05/Gov-Notices-2705.aspx>

Committee's recommendation to government to initiate discussions as is being requested by FKNK.

- 4.5 The Chairman read the first part of the vote, namely FKNK's proposal to open a spring hunting season for Turtle-dove in spring 2019 and the Members proceeded to vote. FKNK voted in favour, BirdLife Malta and ERA voted against, whereas the Chairman and three independent members abstained. FKNK's proposal to open a spring hunting season for Turtle-dove in spring 2019 was turned down.
- 4.6 The Chairman read the second part of the vote, namely Ornithology Committee's recommendation to government to initiate immediate discussions with the European Commission to seek a long-term solution on the issue of Turtle-dove hunting in spring and the Members proceeded to vote. Five members voted in favour, BirdLife Malta voted against whereas ERA abstained. FKNK's proposal recommending immediate discussions between government and the European Commission for a long-term solution on the issue of Turtle-dove hunting in spring was approved by the Committee.

## **5. Any other business**

- 5.1 The Committee agreed to reconvene on 3<sup>rd</sup> April to discuss enforcement during the 2019 spring hunting season for Quail and requested the Secretary to invite ALE and Gozo Police to attend. The meeting was adjourned at 1630 hrs.