



CABS – Committee Against Bird Slaughter
Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.



Police Commissioner
Lawrence Cutajar
Police General Headquarters
Pjazza San Kalcidonju
Floriana FRN 1530
MALTA

Heinz Schwarze (president)
An der Ziegelei 8
D-53127 Bonn / Germany
Tel.: 0228/665521
Fax :0228/665280
Mail: CABS@komitee.de
Internet: www.komitee.de

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OPEN LETTER: Illegal bird trapping at night and inactivity of the police

Dear Commissioner Cutajar,

I am writing to you on behalf of CABS and many Maltese citizens who have the impression that the Malta Police Force – instead of taking a clear stand against wildlife crime - are actually tolerating the illegal trapping of plovers and the widespread use of illegal electronic bird callers during the night.

This impression is based on the fact that, despite a clear legal ban, in more than 83% of the cases reported by CABS the police simply did not respond to reports of illegal night trapping or the use of illegal bird callers.

From 2014 to 2017 CABS teams have been monitoring and reporting illegal night trapping of Golden Plover and other nocturnal bird species on Malta and Gozo during November and December. In the course of these operations a total of 43 calls were made to the police, to report in excess of 100 illegal trapping sites and electronic lures.

All reports were made by phone by our volunteers who informed the officer on duty that the illegalities were ongoing, and in all cases offered to meet with the police and lead them to the sites in question.

36 of these 43 reports were not acted upon. And by saying “not acted upon” i do not mean that the police failed to prosecute anyone which would just be a sign of ineffectiveness. What i mean and what i blame you for is that the overwhelming

majority of district police stations simply refused to respond to our reports, which can be interpreted as a systematic obstruction of justice.

Most of the officers we spoke to on the phone openly declared that the district police would not do anything; arguing that they were not trained for this, it was too dangerous and they were busy. Instead they tried to refer us to their colleagues from the A.L.E. who, as you know, cannot be reached during night hours. All district police encountered during the report process reiterated the fact that no A.L.E. work at night, and they themselves even tried to contact ALE without success between 9.30pm and 4.30am.

As a result of this situation only 3 known cases - representing less than 2% of all night-incidents reported by CABS since November 2014 – resulted in charges being issued to the offenders.

Such a low prosecution rate is nothing else than a declaration of bankruptcy of the Malta Police Force in dealing with a severe conservation problem. This endangers populations of certain bird species, but also the reputation of Malta's law enforcement system, especially because the problem has been known for many years, and it would be very easy to eradicate it provided that more resources were allocated to the A.L.E. and clear protocols were established within the district police.

On 16 January 2016 your predecessor Michael Cassar announced in a media statement that A.L.E. working hours would be adjusted so that their duties could commence before the standard 5am. This concept had the sole purpose of curbing illegal trapping at night. Unfortunately this announcement turned out to be an empty promise. Nearly 2 years later the situation is still totally out of control with electronic lures calling loud all over the island and the A.L.E. not on duty after 9:30pm.

As a conservation NGO we cannot accept a continuation of this situation. Such a massive lack of enforcement forms a straight-forward breach of the EU's Bird's directive which commits Malta to strict supervision of the trapping regulations. We therefore urge you as the head of the Force to finally redeem Mr. Cassar's promise, and to ensure that illegal nets and lures are being dismantled proactively and the offenders are prosecuted where possible.

Yours, Sincerely

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

Heinz Schwarze, CABS president