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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Global amphibian deaths - combating the <i>Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans</i> (Bsal) fungus infecting the EU's salamander and newt populations - Information from the German and Belgian delegations, supported by the Luxembourg delegation

Delegations will find attached a note from the German and Belgian delegations, supported by the Luxembourg delegation, concerning the above subject, on the agenda for the meeting of the Environment Council on 20 June 2016 under 'Any other business'.

Global amphibian deaths - combating the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (Bsal) fungus infecting the EU's salamander and newt populations**- Information from the German and Belgian delegations, supported by the Luxembourg delegation -**

Amphibian populations have been declining worldwide for years. In addition to causes such as the destruction of habitats, environmental pollution and climate change, this is also due to pathogens which are being spread in the course of globalisation. In 2013, a previously unknown pathogen was discovered in the Netherlands, and subsequently in Belgium and Germany: the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (Bsal) salamander fungus, which poses a major threat to the fire salamander and to Europe's other native salamander and newt species.

The fungus is highly infectious and kills within days. The fire salamander population in the Netherlands has been almost completely eradicated by Bsal. This clearly shows that European fire salamanders are under threat. In 2015 Bsal was detected in two terrarium animals in the United Kingdom, and there was a major outbreak affecting various salamander species kept at a site in Germany.

It is suspected that this fungus was/is being introduced by live salamanders from eastern Asia. Bsal can be transmitted through direct body contact between different species of tailed amphibians. For years, amphibians have been imported from Asia to Europe in considerable numbers as domestic pets.

To protect the almost 40 native European species of salamander and newt from the threat of Bsal, it is crucial that we introduce protection measures. Firstly, we must prevent the continued importation of Bsal into the EU (by introducing an EU import ban on Asian salamanders), and secondly, we must prevent the further spread of Bsal within the EU (for example by banning the movement of salamanders within the EU). In this respect, Switzerland adopted a ban on imports of all newts and salamanders in the summer of 2015, and an import ban has been in place in the US for over 200 salamander species since January 2016.

In December 2015, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted a recommendation on the prevention and control of Bsal. Measures include immediate restrictions on the trade in salamanders and newts, monitoring programmes to control the possible further spread of the disease, emergency action plans and research into those aspects of conservation biology relating to the protection of European salamanders and newts.

Germany and Belgium, supported by Luxembourg, therefore propose that corresponding measures be taken at EU level, and would ask the Commission to take the necessary steps:

- to include Bsal in the list of animal diseases annexed to the new EU Animal Health Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/429), insofar as the prerequisites for this are met and as soon as the Regulation enters into force on 21 April 2021;
- as an immediate measure: to include the species introducing this disease in Annex B to the EC Regulation on the protection of species (Regulation (EC) No 338/97).

We would also suggest that the other Member States affected should adopt appropriate protection measures at national level.

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