

ROMANIA



MINISTRY OF WATERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Cabinet of the Minister

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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Executiv Secretary Mr. Hamdallah ZEDAN

Bucharest, 22 October 2002

Dear Mr. ZEDAN,

I have the great pleasure to announce you about an important action for improving the life condition of population and for conservation of natural resources in Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR), this unique zone in the world. We are referring to the concession of the fishing activities in the DDBR, in order to ensure the concept of sustainable development.

Also, we have the opportunity to present our point of view regarding the "Danube Delta's Fisherman Manifest", a small group of fishermen, meaning about 3% from the total numbers of fishermen authorized and which are supported, in theirs requires, by one of the companies which was rejected from the concession process because did not ensure one of the important condition stipulated in the Governmental Decision, the Law for concession of fishing activities in DDBR.

The most number of fishermen authorized in DDBR, about 1.700, agree the concession action and they consider the best solution for harmonizing the fishermen interests with the protection of stock resources, affected by the anarchic fishery in the last year. We consider that in this way, we can resolve the indigene population problems, the increase of the life level and the conservation and protection of the natural resources.

We attached some further information and we hope that will clarify the aspects regarding this subject.

Please, accept the assurance of my highest consideration.

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MINISTER
Petru LIFICIU

Regarding the “Danube Delta’s Fishermen Manifest” we try to clarify some aspects:

1. The decision of Romanian authorities to concession the fishing activities in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve was taken due to the following considerations:
 - in the last 12 years, fish captures in the reserve declined dramatically: from about 12,000 tones in 1989 at 2.740 tones in 2001 with a tendency of decline in the next years. This situation was created by over-exploitation of fish resources (including poaching), the number of fishermen being now 1,700 comparing with 1989 when the number was about 900 and 123 private fishing companies. From this number 1,300 fishermen are be employed by the companies and the rest (400 fishermen selling the fish to companies. Of course, an important quantity of fish is sold to “the black market”. To continue the activity in such conditions will have in very few years dramatically consequences on the fish resource with an important negative impact on the inhabitants live and on the other biodiversity components mainly birds;
 - having in view that the surface of the reserve (580,000 ha) the control and monitoring of this activity is very difficult for our wardens and for the representatives of other institutions (Police, Coast Guard, etc.);
 - in the last 12 years, the fish (who belongs to the state according to Romanian Constitution) was not paid to the state by nobody;
 - nobody invested in the last 12 years in the restocking the fish population which are in decline (pike-perch, carp or sturgeon)
2. Taken into consideration all the presented aspects, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA) proposed and the Ministry of Waters and Environmental Protection and the Romanian Government approved to start the process to give into concession the fishing activity to companies or fishermen associations interested to develop in a sustainable way this activity. Having in view the traditional areas for commercial fishing DDBRA proposed to give into concession the fishing activity in 25 zones where the quotas of fishing is established following scientific research. This concession was developed according to the Romanian Law no. 219/1998. At the concession procedure participated fishing companies (with employed fishermen), associations of companies, and associations

of fishermen associations and companies. The conditions to participated were different for local populations and for companies (very few conditions for local inhabitants).

3. **The right of fishermen to continue their traditional activity is guaranteed** by the obligations of the concessionaries, as follows:
 - **all the fishermen** which have the right to fish in a zone (with Permit from DDBRA) **must be employed by the concessionary**;
 - the concessionary has not the right to license any fisherman without agreement of DDBRA (only in indiscipline cases);
 - in connected activities (processing) the concessionary must have as employers at least 70% people from local inhabitants;
 - the concessionary must employ young people in fishing activity only from the localities of the reserve

- 4 The fishermen who sent the “Danube Delta’s Fishermen Manifest” are employed by a company – Black Sea Caviar s.r.l., which was rejected from the concession process because did not presented documents to prove that the company has not any debts to the state budget. This company was strongly involved only in the fishing and processing of sturgeon and caviar being one of the most important company in this domain in Romania. You can imagine the consequences for this company by losing such profitable activity.

- 5 The fishermen who sent the “Manifest” represent only 40 fishermen in Sf. Gheorghe area and they did not represent all the fishermen, which are authorized to fish in the reserve (1,700 fishermen). We already received some letters from other fishermen (associated to participated at the concession process) also from Sf. Gheorghe area, which do not agree with the actions of the fishermen who send the “Manifest”. I can also prove that some of the fishermen who signed the manifest are now in the stage to be sent in justice for sturgeon poaching.

6. The concessionaries will have a lot of obligations:
 - to use only approved fishing tools
 - to finance the restocking activities for species which are in decline
 - to invest in processing facilities to offer new jobs for local inhabitants (mainly for women which have very few possibilities to find a job in the reserve)
 - to pay a tax to the state budget for captured fish to offer to DDBRA (financed 100% by the state budget) the possibilities to continue the program for natural restoration and other investments in the reserve

- to capture only the allocated quotas on the basis of scientific research and in the limits of carrying capacity of the ecosystems.
- to invest in fishing vessels and in safety equipment for fishermen
- to defend the area against poaching or other illegal activities

If any of these obligations will not be respected we will cancelled the concession.

We hope that we clarified some aspects of your concerns and be sure that we do all it is necessary to protect the traditional activities in our area and to insure that the next generations will have the possibilities to develop such activities. In mean time we do not accept that the interest of some powerful companies, which could also manipulated some fishermen to continue the exploitation of natural resources of the delta without any benefits for local population and without taking into consideration the necessity to preserve the natural resources to be used in a sustainable way in the future.

If you have any other questions or requests please do not hesitate to contact us.