

## **WBRU refutes CABS allegations**

Reference is made to the article titled "[Malta is bird hell amid unbridled trapping](#)" which reports on a statement issued by CABS. The statement makes a number of allegations which are misleading.

The Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU) categorically refutes CABS claim that the Unit "has to date failed to provide the police with an updated list of trappers and sites which have been given a licence in 2016" and that "without these data the police are totally unable to do their job and enforcement of the season is simply not possible". Contrary to this allegation, the Unit confirms that the police were given full access to all licensing data, including details of individual licensees, real-time data on catches reported by trappers and other relevant information. Moreover, WBRU provided the police with a number of rugged tablet computers containing specialized enforcement software that enables enforcement officers to instantly verify registration records pertaining to any trapping site. To be eligible for registration, sites had to meet a number of specific criteria stipulated in the law.

Contrary to CABS's insinuation that no enforcement is taking place, over 70 enforcement officers are deployed daily on patrols. These officers are conducting hundreds of inspections and spot checks on individual trapping sites and licensees in Malta and in Gozo to verify compliance with applicable regulations in the field. Prior to deployment, officers received specialised training delivered by WBRU. Extensive information regarding similar enforcement operations that were conducted during past derogations is available from WBRU website under the following link: <http://msdec.gov.mt/en/Pages/WBRU/livecapturingder.aspx>.

The article furthermore misleads readers into believing that the authorities failed to react to CABS report of alleged illegal trapping sites. Contrary to this insinuation, the WBRU confirms that on Monday 31st October it has received from CABS a map indicating multiple locations of various trapping sites. After immediately acknowledging and thanking CABS for their cooperation on enforcement, the Unit performed necessary checks and responded to CABS on 2nd November, i.e. within 2 days from receiving their report. In its response, WBRU provided CABS with the precise indication of 28 sites that are not registered and where any trapping is illegal. This information has also been referred to the police and to the Environment and Resources Authority, and necessary surveillance and inspections is being conducted on these sites to identify and prosecute any potential law breakers.

CABS statement furthermore criticised a short video clip produced by WBRU in collaboration with the ALE in 2015, labelling it a "one-sided promotional video" which is "painting a false picture of the situation and has nothing to do with the reality in the field". The clip can be viewed from here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNeUffX6Uqc>. In reality, this clip is purely fact-based and aims at providing visual illustration of the strict supervision and enforcement regime enacted by the authorities during live-capturing derogations. This regime, amongst other, involves special licensing procedure, registration of trapping sites, scientifically-determined national, and individual quotas, the mandatory legally-binding use of a real-time telephonic game reporting system, special single-use ringing requirements, restrictions on live decoys, size and configuration of live-capturing sites, as well as restrictions pertaining to permitted methods of capture.

CABS statement is furthermore misleading with regards to penalties meted out to persons convicted of trapping-related offences. The penalties referred to in the video clip apply to illegal capture of protected birds listed in Schedules I and IX of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations. These penalties include an automatic €5,000 fine (on first conviction), permanent revocation of license, and imprisonment for one year. Other trapping-related offences may carry lesser penalties, however recent cases show that such deterrents are nonetheless significant. For example, on 24th June 2015 one person was charged with illegal trapping, convicted and sentenced to a €2,000 fine and 2 years suspension of all licences issued under Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations. On 13th October 2015, a bird trapper from Gozo has been found guilty of illegal finch trapping in spring 2015. He was sentenced to pay €8,000 and has his trapping permit and hunting licence revoked for life. On 14th October 2015 a bird trapper was fined €2,400 and lost his hunting and trapping licence for 3 years, after having been found guilty by the court of illegally trapping finches in spring 2015. On the same day another person was also sentenced to a €1,200 fine and had his licences suspended for 2 years for illegal finch trapping in spring 2014.