

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Association "Baltic Environmental Forum", Foundation "Latvian Fund for Nature", Foundation "Environmental Education Foundation", World Wide Fund for Nature, Latvian Ornithological Society, The Environmental facts, The Kemeru National Park Found, The Environmental Protection Club, The Latvian Fishermen's Association, Association "Latvian lakes", Association "Green Liberty", Association "Eco-design Competence Center", Association "Lake and Swamp Research Center, Association "Latvian Botanical Society", Latvian Beekeeping Association, Latvian Waste Management Association, Association „Baltic coast”, Association "Zero Waste Latvia", Association "Latvian Environmental Management Association., Foundation "Teiči Nature Foundation".

Rīga, Peldu street 26/28, LV-1494

January 26, 2022, Riga

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Urgent action is needed to save the Tauros in Latvia.

The Environmental Advisory Council, as the main social partner to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, consisting of 20 elected national environmental NGOs as well as other organizations -*Animal Rights Association B.&T., Latvian Landscape*, rise strong concerns regarding urgent need to protect rewilded Tauros in Latvia.

Environmental protection NGOs and experts and professionals address the Latvian civil society, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Justice and the European Commission with a common message, to save the population of Tauros in Latvia. These unique herbivores living in protected nature has become "outside the law" in Latvia and are going to be eliminated at the earliest time, in a case the legal framework is not urgently changed and the corresponding exemption for Tauros status in Latvia and the EU granted.

Over last decade, thousands of visitors of the Kemeru National Park and Pape Nature Park may observe and enjoy the results of successful rewilding example of the Tauros keeping restored grassland habitats stretched for hundreds of hectares. This success story of the species rewilding has been greatly appreciated by nature scientists and the international organization

REWILDING EUROPE. The Kemeru National Park administration has received several international nominations and gratitude for the successful restoration of grassland habitats.

The Environmental Advisory Council on behalf of 20 organizations urgently request the responsible authorities to review the existing legal framework concerning rewilded Tauros.

In a case the existing legal framework will not be urgently changed, Tauros may have to be eliminated in Latvia, bringing shame on Latvia as well as the EU. Thus, we are deeply concerned about the excellent results of 19 yearlong complex nature restoration work going to be destroyed and Latvia losing the. The fact that the destruction can be carried out in such popular protected nature areas of Latvia (NATURA 2000 sites) as the Kemeru National Park and Pape Nature Park worries us the most.

Renaturalized species of herbivores– invaluable restorators specifically for grasslands biodiversity

Several centuries ago in Europe, including Latvia, natural grasslands and the landscape of open meadows were maintained by large herbivores – Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), horse forerunner tarpan and European bison (wisent). The last tributes of the wild species of Aurochs went extinct in the 17 th century. In order to fill this void in the natural ecosystem, breeding work was started in the early 20th century to obtain a descendant of the particular wild species (derived from domesticated forms of *Bos primigenius taurus*, and which is still being sought as having been brought closer to the wild. The original variety name was Heck cattle - now called *taurgovs* (taur-cow) in Latvian.

For nearly 20 years now, with the support of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the conservation NGOs in Latvia, these descendants of wild herbivores have also returned to the Latvian landscape. Their entry and management was determined by the necessity to restore and maintain the dwindling habitats of natural grasslands. Although Tauros in Latvia are dwelling in wild conditions in large pastures without human intervention, the areas dedicated to them is strongly spared in order to avoid conflicts with agriculture sector and farm animals. As a biodiversity conservation tool Tauros help the Latvian nature protection management to restore and maintain large areas of rare natural grassland habitats of the EU importance.

Currently, there are only 270 - 300 Tauros left in Latvia in Pape Nature Park, Kemeru National Park (in two areas) and the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve in the biological farm “Jungas”.

“Two herds established in the Kemeru National Park since the introduction of the first animals from Western Europe, are very well adapted to the local conditions”, says Andis Liepa, head of the National Park Found, “although wolves are constantly in the vicinity of Tauros herds, they have learned to withstand for themselves and well protect the newborn calves, thus, wolves fulfill the role of natural sanitation of dead animals. The wild forests and grassland area inhabited by Tauros provide shelter and food for big predatory birds, mainly sea eagles.”

The EU and national legislation regarding bovine animals require the individual identification and registration of all bovine animals in the national agricultural database regardless of the purpose, type of holding or origin of the animals. In a case the particular animal is moved or transported, each movement must be recorded and reported and the individual number of the particular animal must be indicated. The requirement has no exemptions, as it ensures veterinary monitoring for farm animals and the traceability of food in the country.

However, the movement requirements are not the only ones applicable to the rewilded Tauros listed on legal regulations as Heck cattle.

Although in Latvia Tauros do not live in farms or outdoor paddocks, but in vast wilderness in NATURA 2000 areas and calves are born in hidden places guarded by the whole heard, the Ministry of Agriculture stipulate that Tauros are still legally domestic or farm animals, and therefore the owners of Tauros must comply with the unified requirements, i.e.: Within 21 days of birth, calves must be marked with ear tags and blood samples must be taken every three, five years from all individuals. Mentioned requirements are highly dangerous and impossible to apply to Tauros as to the completely rewilded animals. Even if this extremely expensive, labor-intensive

and human-threatening task could be carried out, it would have been counter-productive and detrimental to the development and reinforcement of renaturalized wildlife skills of Tauros species.

According to the reintroduction agreement signed on the entry of Tauros into Latvia, they, unlike ordinary livestock, are not intended for the meat or milk production. The only task of Tauros is to maintain an open landscape, restore grassland habitats and develop a balanced life-space with favorable conditions for other species like insects and birds. The Tauros herds live in large seminatural grasslands within NATURA 2000 sites strongly separated from farmed cattle, lowering the potential transmission of infections and cross-breeding with the farmed breeds of animals down to zero. Endowed with significant differences from domestic cattle rewilded Tauros have demonstrated the necessary wildlife survival skills. Thus, it is obviously unreasonable to apply the identical requirements both to farm animals and to the Tauros population adapted for wildlife.

The owners of Tauros heard have requested the responsible institutions –the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Veterinary Service, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development in a timely and multiple manner to find a reasonable solution. Although the European Union legislation allows the EU member states to establish justified and proven derogation measures in their national legislation, the responsible institutions of Latvia so far are not willing to seek a rational and reasonable solution in line with the European Green Deal, preserving the beneficial herbivore intended for the restoration of grassland habitats, and thus respecting the rewilding policy as such:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/protecting-environment-and-oceans-green-deal_en.

The statement of the responsible authorities stays unchangeable: "... in a case you do not meet the identification mark requirements for Tauros and don't make regular blood sampling, the animals must disappear!", according to the principle - no animal, no problems.

As the EU and its member states are committed to setting biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030, the conservation and ecosystem's restoration is a common obligation for the EU Member States. Furthermore protecting and restoring nature for future generations is a common concern and joint responsibility of each citizen stated in the Constitution of Latvia.

Considering the existing regulations inadequate for the reintroduced and adapted for wildlife Tauros, as explained above, - we call for urgent review and amendments of the regulatory framework into the relevant Latvian and the EU legislation, in order to state Tauros species (called Tauros or Heck cattle) as "wild animals".

On behalf of twenty signatories of the Environmental Advisory Council,

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ANNEX

1. In chronological order, documents from Kemeru National Park Found and biological farm "Jungas" records (added separately):
 - 1.1. Annex1. – The Kemeru National Park Trilateral Agreement on wildlife grazing pastures;
 - 1.2. Annex 2. – The biological farm's „Jungas” letter to the Food and Veterinary Service, Republic of Latvia;
 - 1.3. Annex 3. – The biological farm's „Jungas” correspondence with the Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Latvia (with the farm owner's comments); the Ministry of Agriculture does not recognize Tauros kept for restored grassland habitats and Konik horses as wild animals;
 - 1.4. Annex 4. – The State Veterinary Service's records on the legal trespass at Kemeru National Park and initiation of the panishment procedure. Warning of the imposition on fine;
 - 1.5. Annex 5. – The plea of Kemeru National Park to the State Veterinary Service for not to impose penalties;
 - 1.6. Annex 6. – The State Veterinary Service request to perform blood sampling on Tauros;
 - 1.7. Annex 7. – The Ministry of Agriculture refusal to apply derogation to Tauros kept for restored grassland habitats and Konik horses;
 - 1.8. Annex 8. – The veterinary inspection record issued to the biological farm „Jungas” by the State Veterinary Service;
 - 1.9. Annex 9. – The warning issued by the State Veterinary Service to apply penalties for the biological farm „Jungas”;
 - 1.10. Annex 10. – „REWILDING EUROPE” official Certificate of Achievement for the wildlife grazing pastures in Kemeru National Park.

2. The Tauros issue on the Latvian media:

<https://www.retv.lv/raksts/vai-taurovis-bus-jaiznicina>

<https://neatkariga.nra.lv/komentari/elita-veidmane/365033-vai-ministriju-gausuma-un-birokratijas-del-tiks-likvidetas-taurovis>

<https://jauns.lv/raksts/zinas/473739-laiks-atvadities-lai-nebutu-jamaksa-sodi-saimniekam-teju-neizpildamo-prasibu-del-janogalina-taurovis>

<https://www.la.lv/nespejot-izpildit-likuma-prasibas-zemnieku-saimniecibai-iespejams-naksies-likvidet-taurovis>

<https://www.ntz.lv/redakcijas-sleja/vai-pielausim-ka-zaudesim-pavisam-nesen-atgutas-taurovis/>

<https://www.liepajniekiem.lv/zinas/novados/kuti-vai-savvala-visas-govis-vienlidzigas/>

<https://tautaruna.nra.lv/nebusanas/364411-birokratijas-del-naksies-likvidet-jungu-plavas-mitosas-taurovis/?fbclid=IwAR1MMij-CbSFI0X9M4g7rLDeBa4M6TZRI1Y1Mnbq-fSNPnH1BWf3T8vC2-Q>

https://pietiek.com/raksti/nepieciesama_steidzama_riciba_lai_glabtu_latvijas_taurgovis_nevis_politiku_un_ierednu_vairisanas_no_atbildibas/

<https://nra.lv/latvija/369356-nepieciesama-steidzama-riciba-lai-glabtu-latvijas-taurovis.htm>

3. Videos of Tauros managing Kemer National Park's territory and catching Tauros:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/KemerNationalPark/playlists>

<https://youtu.be/cZxLVcpX42U>

<https://youtu.be/octULbPTeD8>