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Sweden Takes Steps to Pinch Unregulated Imports of US Live Lobster

Report Categories:

Fishery Products

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Report Highlights:

The Swedish Ministry of Environment has voiced concerns regarding live imported lobsters from North America released in Swedish waters. Sweden intends to ban unregulated imports and sales of live American lobster, mainly sourced in United States and Canada. However, exemptions for importers with a closed system for boiling lobster will be granted. Sweden is now preparing a proposal to the European Commission and the World Trade Organization for permission to impose a ban and hopes it can be in place by next summer.

General Information:

American lobsters have been found in Swedish waters on several occasions during the past few years. The lobsters found are believed to have been released or escaped from cages in the sea. This is occurring despite the fact that there already is a ban that prohibits keeping live lobsters in domestic water. Sweden fears the risk of new diseases and cross breeding with domestic crustaceans. In a press article on August 2, 2012, the Swedish Minister of Environment, Lena Ek, said that the government wants to ban the import and sale of live lobsters. However, it may be possible to exempt importers who have a closed system for boiling lobsters. Sweden will be applying to the European Commission and the World Trade Organization for permission to impose a ban, which the government hopes can be in place by next summer. The Minister says she hopes Norway and other neighboring EU-countries will follow Sweden's lead.

Background:

On April 26, 2012, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) sent a proposal to the Ministry of Environment to ban the entry and import of live American lobster (*Homarus Americanus*) to Sweden.

The proposal lists three major reasons for banning entering and importation of live American lobster:

1. The American lobster carries several contagious diseases, two of which means high respective very high mortality in the European lobster, which is the natural occurring species along the Swedish coast. If diseases are spread to Swedish waters, the effects can be very dramatic and have a negative impact on the native stock of European lobster and lobster fishing. In the long run, this can also threaten the existence of the species in Swedish waters.
2. The American lobster's life condition coincides well with the European lobster. Therefore, it is most likely that both species will compete for food and space. The American lobster can wander long distances. Thus, it has high potential to spread naturally once it has established itself, which can have ecological consequences for the Swedish stock.
3. There is a risk of hybridization with native European lobster, which may result in negative genetic effects with consequences for Swedish and other European stocks.

The EU Commission is currently developing a proposal for an EU Invasive Species Strategy. It is unclear whether the proposal will include new import restrictions. It is also uncertain whether the American lobster will be included in any list of invasive species.

Individual Member States may not restrict trade and the spreading of invasive alien species based on current regulations for Plant Protection, Animal Health and Welfare and Use of Species in Aquaculture. However, in 2003, Sweden succeeded in implementing a ban on live freshwater crayfish based on the

Species Protection Ordinance which regulates entry of live freshwater crayfish in Swedish legislation and was approved by the EU Commission.

Swedish lobster importers welcome the Swedish government's intention to include some kind of exemption or certification in order to allow serious importers who maintain closed systems for boiling of lobsters to continue their operations. The industry recognizes the problem with the illegal handling of live lobster and would like to see tighter control, but were against a ban of ALL imports of live American lobster, which was originally proposed by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM).

Sweden imports approximately 300 tons/year of live American lobster, mainly from United States and Canada. A possible ban (without exemptions) would limit Swedish consumers to purchasing European lobster, which are much more expensive. Reportedly, Swedish lobster amount to only 20 tons per year. In 2011, Sweden imported 180 tons of live American lobster from the United States at a value of US\$ 2.6 million. The major importers sell about 50% boiled lobster to retailers and 50% live lobster to wholesalers. If the Swedish government opt for boiling requirements verses a ban, importers and wholesalers without closed systems will no longer have access to live American lobster.