

Petition to Stop Trade, Import and Export of Cave Contents

Regarding Article 3 (b) and (l) of the Treaty establishing the European Community and the UNESCO Convention (concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage), we, the signatory organisations, petition to stop the trade, import and export of cave contents.

Analogous to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, there is an urgent need for a convention on the nonliving heritage of the world. This includes, among others, cave contents.

Caves and karst areas are often transboundary regions, but the legal framework dealing with caves and cave protection varies greatly within the EU member states. The EU Habitats Directive mentions only bats but no other cave fauna. The EU Groundwater Directive does not take karst phenomena like high flow rates and low filtration capacity into account. With the ongoing climatic change and the expected water shortage in certain regions the importance of karst aquifers will increase even more. Up to now, there is still a profound lack of concern and protection for caves and karst in the European Community.

Caves belong to the most fragile ecosystems in the world. They are also archives of geological history, evolution, climate and culture. To be meaningful, the protection of caves has to include the protection of cave contents - otherwise it would only be the protection of the cover of a book without its pages.

Cave contents include speleothems, sediments, fossils and archaeological findings. Speleothems are defined as any natural mineral formation or deposit occurring in natural caves, including but not limited to stalactites, stalagmites, helictites, gypsum flowers, flowstones, crystals, draperies or rimstones.

Caves from which speleothems have been removed lose in value and beauty. This is seen in many showcaves and reduces the value of tourist regions of member states. Extracting and trading the unique formations of caves causes not only the loss of aesthetic and emotional value, but invaluable scientific information like palaeoclimatic data is lost as well.

Fossils and subfossils are often found in caves and their uncontrolled removal is not only a loss to scientific research but can also lead to significant damages of the cave and its content.

Generally, all member states have laws dealing with archaeological discoveries. However, archaeological sites inside caves are usually not readily visible. Experts are needed to detect and evaluate sites prior to their uncovering. Even minimal changes in sensitive sections of a cave can lead to the total destruction of unique archaeological sites.

Removal of speleothems, fossils, sediments and archaeological findings for scientific investigations must always be reduced to a minimum, in order to avoid an excessive depletion of the natural cave features. Decisions require careful considerations by specialist researchers and advice from experienced cave and karst experts. If research on a speleothem or fossil will likely result in the destruction of a sampling site, then the choice should be to abstain from the study.

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To ensure the protection of cave contents, the following demands have to be implemented:

- a) Speleothems or fragments of these (even if already broken), fossils, sediments or archaeological findings must not be extracted from caves, except for cases mentioned under c).**
- b) Trade, import and export of cave content has to be prohibited.**
- c) Scientific sampling has to be restricted to the absolutely necessary minimum. Scientific benefits have to be maximized through consultation with cave experts.**

Organisation, date, signature