

# *Policy Position Statement on Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) and hybrids in Ireland and Northern Ireland*

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## **Executive Summary**

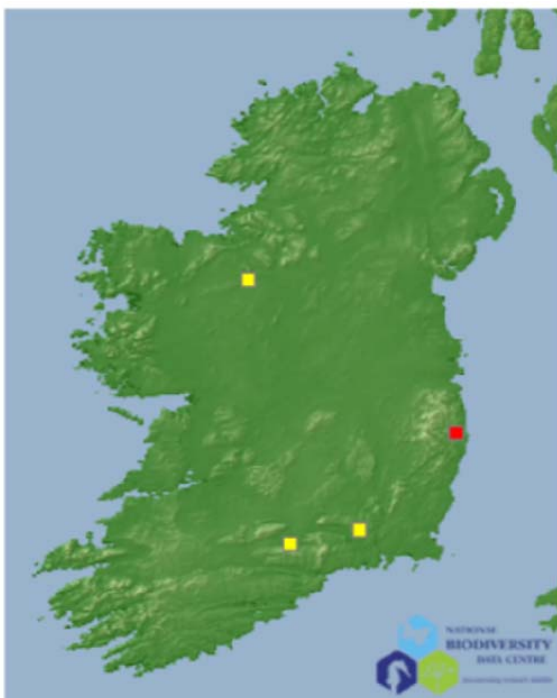
This Policy Position Statement (PPS) was prepared by Invasive Species Ireland on behalf of the Invasive Species Ireland Steering Group. It summarises the policy position surrounding importing, keeping, releasing and the escape of wild boar and hybrids in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Invasive Species Ireland Steering Group does not support the introduction of wild boar into the wild in Ireland or Northern Ireland. The Group does support measures taken to prevent escapes or deliberate release. The Group also supports appropriate and legal action to remove any populations that may exist.

## **Background**

Wild boar is considered by some experts as a former native species on the island of Ireland that did not survive into historical times. The exact time of the extirpation of this species from Ireland is obscured by the introduction of the domestic pig. The archaeological records indicate that wild boar survived to at least 5600 b.p. The domestic pig in Ireland may have been domesticated from wild boar or interbred with it (see Yalden 1999 for an account of the history of wild boar in Ireland).

In recent years, there have been verified sightings of wild boar at four sites in the Republic of Ireland (Figure 1). There are no records of wild boar from Northern Ireland. As no licences have been granted to release wild boar into the wild in Ireland, these sightings are indicative of a breach of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. Should any release or escape occur in Northern Ireland, it would contravene the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.



**Figure 1:** Verified sightings of wild boar in Ireland. Map produced by the National Biodiversity Data Centre, June 2011. Red squares: 2 records per 1km<sup>2</sup>; Yellow squares: 1 record per 1km<sup>2</sup>.

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## **The need for this Policy Position Statement**

In the absence of preventative measures, wild boar have the potential to establish a viable population on the island of Ireland. Should a population be allowed to persist and grow, management measures would be required, particularly where the species becomes a threat to farm animal health or a pest to conservation goals, agricultural productivity, and human health and safety. Experience from other European countries indicates that wild boar have a high reproductive potential and, in the absence of control, can increase rapidly in numbers and act as a wildlife reservoir for serious animal diseases such as Classical Swine Fever or Aujeszky's Disease. Since the 1950's, wild boar populations have increased both in numbers and distribution throughout Europe, apparently due to lack of predators, extreme adaptability, artificial feeding and mild winters. Present populations in EU member states are estimated at between 800,000 and 1 million<sup>1</sup> animals.

## **Outline of potential impacts**

The import of wild boar into Ireland and Northern Ireland is regulated primarily for the protection of animal health under the terms of Directive 64/432/EEC. Additionally, the keeping of wild boar by private individuals in Northern Ireland is regulated under the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. The most significant impact of allowing feral wild boar populations to become established would be on the disease risks associated with the incursion and maintenance of notifiable diseases. Notifiable diseases associated with wild boar include:

- African Swine Fever (ASF)
- Aujeszky's Disease
- Classical Swine Fever (CSF)
- Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)
- Rabies
- Swine Vesicular Disease (SVD)

Most of these diseases are exotic to Ireland, with Aujeszky's Disease on the threshold of being eliminated completely. While practices to prevent the incursion of notifiable diseases in Ireland have a high success rate, the possibility of an outbreak of one or more of the above cannot be discounted to 100% certainty. Should an outbreak occur, control measures would normally be put in place with immediate effect. The efficacy and cost of control programmes may be altered significantly by wild boar. Additionally, wild boar are susceptible to and could transmit bovine tuberculosis (TB), which is a notifiable disease.

From a disease perspective, the potential impact of wild boar is therefore twofold:

(a) wild boar may introduce exotic diseases, which may spread to domestic pigs (e.g. ASF / CSF / SVD) or

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<sup>1</sup> Kramer-Scadt S, Fernandez N, Thulke H (2007) Potential ecological and epidemiological factors affecting the persistence of classical swine fever in wild boar *Sus scrofa* populations. Mamm Rev 37 (1):1-2

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other livestock species (FMD /rabies); and

(b) where disease occurs in domestic livestock, the presence of wild boar in the wild is likely to compromise or delay its eradication.

In terms of nature conservation, wild boar as a keystone species could, for example, impact significantly on ancient and semi-natural woodlands, driving ecological change in these environments. These habitats support many protected and rare species which could be disturbed or displaced by the feeding behaviour of wild boar. The impacts associated with wild boar could threaten the integrity of some Natura 2000 sites and other protected sites in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## **The Policy Position Statement**

The Invasive Species Ireland Steering Group has formed a reasoned policy on the unregulated release of wild boar into the wild in Ireland. This PPS is intended to bring clarity to the status of the introduction of this species into the wild in Ireland and also provide a framework on which to base the management of wild boar in Ireland.

**Policy Statement 1** We recognise that should wild boar become established in the wild in either Ireland or Northern Ireland that this would represent a significant threat to animal health, conservation goals, and public health and safety. We support the existing measures put in place to prevent any illegal imports and support any improvements made in import controls to prevent illegal imports. We also support the proper and adequate regulation of wild boar farming/breeding to ensure that all wild boar in Ireland and Northern Ireland are traceable and secure to prevent escape or deliberate unlicensed release.

**Policy Statement 2** We acknowledge that any proposed introduction of wild boar, or any hybrids, into the wild in Ireland or Northern Ireland would need to conform to the strict IUCN Guidelines for Re-introduction before they could be considered for licensing. Furthermore, any unlicensed release of wild boar into the wild in Northern Ireland or Ireland contravenes either the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) or the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. This Policy Statement calls on all keepers of wild boar to prevent any further releases and/or escapes of wild boar; to co-operate fully with the regulatory authorities should the need to manage wild boar arise; and to report any escapes that occur in a timely manner.

**Policy Statement 3** We encourage collaboration between state agencies, private landowners, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders to develop and disseminate information on the risks associated with feral wild boar.

**Policy Statement 4** We recognise that it is cost effective to respond to invasive species as early as possible in the invasion. This Policy Statement encourages the timely reporting of any feral wild boar in the wild in Ireland or Northern Ireland.

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**Policy Statement 5** We support the eradication of feral wild boar on the island of Ireland while recognising all relevant legislative instruments.

This policy is supported by the Wild Boar Invasive Species Action Plan.

This PPS has been prepared as part of Invasive Species Ireland and represents the views of the members of the Steering Group (Appendix 1) at the time of writing. The PPS will be updated as and when required by the Invasive Species Ireland Steering Group.

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**APPENDIX 1**

**INVASIVE SPECIES IRELAND STEERING GROUP MEMBERS INVOLVED IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THIS DOCUMENT**

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine (DAFM)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)
- National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin
- Local Biodiversity Officers Forum
- Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside (CNCC)