



PRESS RELEASE, 4 September 2026

## **WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY, HISTORIC APPLICATION OF ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONSTITUTION TO THE CGARS: PRE-SEASON HUNTING OF WILD TURTLE DOVES IN SICILY BLOCKED**

The Council of Administrative Justice upholds the arguments put forward by LEAL and Pro Natura: the precautionary principle and the protection of biodiversity take precedence over hunting interests. The Sicilian Regional Government has been heavily criticised for its Wildlife Plan, which expired over seven years ago.

PALERMO, 4 September 2026 – A significant legal and civil victory for the protection of wildlife and the environment in Sicily. With Order No. 296/2026 (published today), the Administrative Justice Council for the Region of Sicily (CGARS) has confirmed the ban on early-season hunting of the Eurasian turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), a species in a critical state of conservation, rejecting the appeals on this point lodged by the Sicilian Regional Government and the main hunting associations.

The ruling – secured following legal action brought by LEAL (Anti-Vivisection League ETS) and the National Pro Natura Federation APS, with the support of Cabs and Green Impact – sets a precedent of extraordinary significance for the entire environmental and animal welfare movement.

### **I KEY KEY AND PRONUNCIATION FOR ORGANISATIONS**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF ANIMAL WELFARE**

#### **1. The primacy of biodiversity over economic and sporting interests**

For the first time, taking such a firm stance against regional hunting calendars, the CGARS reaffirms that the protection of the environment, flora and fauna constitutes an absolute value and a fundamental asset. Expressly referring to the reform of Article 9 of the Constitution and Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the appeal judges have ruled that the requirements for wildlife conservation clearly take precedence over the conflicting economic and sporting interests of hunters.

## **2. The rigorous application of the ‘Precautionary Principle’**

The Order stipulates that, in the face of even a potential risk of harm to the ecosystem or to endangered species, public authorities have a duty to take preventive action. In weighing up the alleged ‘damage’ complained of by hunters due to the suspension of hunting activities against the risk of extinction or depletion of bird species, the administrative court deemed the protection of environmental health and biodiversity to be of paramount importance.

## **3. ‘Wild West’ planning practices condemned: no to hunting calendars without updated plans**

The Administrative Court has severely criticised the actions of the Sicilian Regional Government, which issued the 2026–2027 Hunting Calendar based on a planning document (the Wildlife and Hunting Plan) that had not been updated since the 2013–2018 five-year period. A delay of over seven years deemed entirely incompatible with the requirements for the scientific monitoring of migratory wildlife and with the scientific opinions of ISPRA.

## **STATEMENTS FROM THE ASSOCIATIONS AND THE SOLICITOR**

“This order marks a historic turning point in the legal battles to defend animals. The CGARS has made it absolutely clear that hunting is not an untouchable right and that the lives of animals and the balance of ecosystems are protected by the Constitution. Stopping the slaughter of wild turtle doves during the pre-season was a necessary act of civilisation and scientific rigour that the Region sought to ignore in order to appease the hunting lobbies.”

Aurora Loprete, Maria Chiara Giovinazzo and Luca D’Agostino (Legal Advisors to LEAL and Pro Natura):

“The Administrative Justice Council’s decision restores the precautionary principle and Article 9 of our Constitution to the heart of the law. The Sicilian Regional Government will no longer be able to ignore ISPRA’s opinions or continue to govern the territory using wildlife management plans that have been out of date for almost a decade. This is a victory for environmental law that strengthens all the organisations fighting every day in the courts to protect wildlife.”