

Boiling Mad

By Reg P. Wydeven
January 28, 2018

When I came home for Christmas break during college, my high school buddies and I would always get together to catch up. One year we were at my friend Lee's house. We had a great time playing Nintendo and telling tall tales in his basement.

Lee was going ice fishing the next morning, so he had a pail of minnows all set to go. Being typical idiot guys, one of my pals dared Lee to swallow one whole. Without blinking, he grabbed one by the tail, reared his head back and dropped it in his mouth, swallowing it in one gulp.

First of all, we were impressed that he accepted the challenge. Secondly, we were even more impressed that he had accomplished such a feat right in front of us. In even more typical idiotic guy fashion, another friend tried to follow suit, only the minnow didn't go down; it came back up with a lot of the pizza we had for dinner.

In addition to being stupid, our stunt was cruel. Both to Lee's carpet and, more importantly, to the minnows. Granted their future looked bleak anyway, they would have died with more dignity and served a greater purpose by being eaten by a northern pike.

And arguably, it was illegal. Chapter 951 of the Wisconsin Statutes governs crimes against animals, which includes treating any animal in a cruel manner. Most states have a similar law on their books. For years, animal rights activists have tried to apply this law to lobsters.

Thanks to a new law in Switzerland, they may have a little more ammunition.

The new law bans the common culinary practice of throwing a lobster into boiling water while it is still conscious. Usually neutral, the Swiss took a stand in support of lobsters' rights after studies suggest that lobsters are sentient with advanced nervous systems that may feel pain.

The studies were conducted by Professor Robert Elwood, emeritus professor in ecology, evolution, behavior and environmental economics at Queens University, Belfast. His experiments indicated that crustaceans will make serious life and death decisions when exposed to pain. Hermit crabs, for example, quickly abandoned a shell if it was exposed to a large electric shock.

Based on these results, Elwood said that, "With the data we know, it is highly likely that the animal will be in pain." Therefore, he believes boiling them alive is inhumane.

The new rule takes effect in March and states that, "Crustaceans must now be stunned before they are killed." I suggest telling the lobsters the cost of four years of college. Alternatively, they must be killed instantly. Elwood feels that "an experienced chef, using a large, sharp knife, thrust into the right place into the head of the lobster and then cutting down along the midway" should kill the lobster "very quickly and effectively" and is "the most humane" way to do so.

Another clause in the bill provides them with protections while in transit. The new measure states that, "Live crustaceans, including the lobster, may no longer be transported on ice or in ice water. Aquatic species must always be kept in their natural environment." Italy adopted a similar law recently precluding lobsters being kept on ice in restaurant kitchens.

According to PETA's website, the best way to help put an end to cruelty to lobsters "is to go vegan." Seafood lovers believe that lobsters trying to avoid being eaten are just being shellfish.

This article originally appeared in the Appleton Post-Crescent newspaper and is reprinted with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. © 2018 McCarty Law LLP. All rights reserved.