



### **Questions and answers on changing the protection status of the wolf under the Bern Convention**

Brussels, 20 December 2023

#### **Why is the Commission proposing to change the wolf's protection status under the Bern Convention?**

After a long history of deliberate persecution which led to the extinction of the wolf in most European countries, the combination of a number of ecological, social and legislative changes (legal protection, land abandonment, natural reforestation, increase in wild ungulates populations, changes of public attitudes towards this species) allowed the wolf to survive and then to undergo a rapid population recovery at the end of the 20th century and in particular in the past ten to twenty years.

Today, the species is present in all mainland European countries, with some countries hosting large populations of over 1,000 individuals. Populations of the wolf have significantly increased in the last two decades and continue to show generally positive trends. Moreover, they are occupying increasingly larger territories. The continued expansion has led to increasing conflicts with human activities, notably concerning livestock damages caused by the wolf. Depredation has reached important levels, affecting more and more regions, both within EU Member States and non-EU Bern Contracting Parties. Wolf depredation of livestock is the main driver of conflicts with humans, alongside the range and population expansion of the species. While the impact is small at EU level and overall damage to livestock appears as tolerable at country level, its concentration at a local level leads to strong pressure on certain areas and regions.

#### **What is the legal procedure for next steps?**

As a contracting party of the Convention on the Conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats (Bern Convention), the EU may table proposals for amendments to the 'Standing Committee of the Convention', such as with the current proposal on the wolf and as regards its protection status.

The Commission proposal for a Council Decision needs to be agreed by a qualified majority of Member States in the Council in order to allow for the amendment proposal to be tabled by the European Union at the next meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention and to support it in the vote.

The next meeting of the Standing Committee and relevant for the tabled proposal is the 44th meeting which is scheduled to take place end 2024. However, an earlier meeting could also be requested by the EU, if deemed necessary.

#### **What are the implications for EU legislation?**

Any future decision to lower the protection status of the wolf in the EU legislation will be subject to a decision taken by the Council on the Commission proposal presented today and, as a second step, the outcome of the relevant Standing Committee Meeting of the Bern Convention. Then the EU could decide on a possible targeted amendment of the EU Habitats Directive. This would require a co-decision process, starting with a legal proposal from the Commission.

#### **Will damage prevention measures still be eligible under the Common Agricultural Policy? Would it still be possible for national authorities to compensate damage to livestock through state aid?**

The fact that the wolf might be a protected species, and not any more a strictly protected species, does not change anything in the possibility to access EU funds to support coexistence and the implementation of prevention measures. The wolf will remain a protected species under both the EU and international legislation, and the obligation to achieve favourable conservation status will remain. The same applies for the rules on the authorised national state aid schemes aiming at compensating farmers for any loss related to attacks by the wolf.

In a [joint letter sent by Commissioners Sinkevičius and Wojciechowski](#) to all EU Ministers for Agriculture and Environment in November 2021, the Commission stressed the availability of EU

support and the need for national authorities to programme the appropriate preventive measures to help livestock farmers address the challenges of the presence of the wolf and other large carnivores. This call on Member States remains fully valid.

Under the CAP Strategic Plans, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can provide support for preventive actions and investments aimed at mitigating the risk of damages by large carnivores to livestock farming as well as for relevant measures on knowledge transfer, training, advice and cooperation between rural actors. In addition, payments for environmentally beneficial grazing practices may cover additional labour costs in the premium for maintenance of protective fences or the regular costs related to maintenance of livestock guarding dogs and shepherding.

15 Member States are making use of these possibilities and have included targeted interventions in their [CAP Strategic Plans](#) (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia).

The LIFE programme may also provide support in facilitating the co-existence of farming and large carnivores and has already been extensively used for this purpose. Finally, EU state aid rules allow Member States to compensate up to 100% of direct and indirect costs of damages caused by protected species. It is also possible to finance up to 100% of preventive investments.

### **Can a 'protected species' be hunted?**

According to both the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive, if a species is 'protected' (as opposed to 'strictly protected'), hunting can be authorised, taking into account the conservation of the populations. The hunting such a species has to be carefully regulated by Member States since they are still obliged to ensure that the favourable conservation status is achieved and maintained for the populations in their biogeographical regions.

### **Does this proposal to reduce wolf protection reflect the opinions expressed by the majority of people who participated in the data collection announced 4 September 2023?**

The aim of the exercise carried out between 4 and 22 September was not to collect opinions in favour or against the strict protection of the wolf in the EU, but to collect relevant data to feed into the comprehensive analysis of the wolf situation. The [in-depth analysis](#) contains an overview of the inputs received during the data collection.

### **How is the EU conservation status of the wolf established?**

First of all, monitoring of large carnivores is carried out regularly by national authorities, under article 11 of the Habitats Directive.

As regards protected species, national authorities assess the conservation status based on monitoring data on population (size, trends and structure), range (area and trend), available habitat (quantity, trend and quality) and future prospects (pressures and threats).

Member States report every six years the results to the Commission, based on common methodology and formats, elaborated (and regularly updated) within the relevant expert group.

Based on these data, the Commission, assisted by the European Environment Agency, makes an assessment of the conservation status per EU biogeographic region.

The [latest report](#), published in 2020, presents the results of the 3rd reporting cycle for the period 2013–2018. The next data will be reported by Member States in 2025 for the EU report to be published in 2026.

The in-depth analysis published by the Commission today is based on the most up-to-date data available, including the results of a data collection the Commission conducted in September 2023.

### **For More Information**

[Press release](#)

[Commission's proposal to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention](#)

[In-depth Analysis](#)

[EU Habitats Directive](#)

[Large Carnivores website](#)

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