

Follow up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe

- 1. Resolution tabled pursuant to Rules 132/(2) and (4) of the European Parliament's Rules of procedure**
- 2. Reference numbers:** 2022/2952 (RSP) / B9-0503/2022 / P9_TA(2022)0423
- 3. Date of adoption of the resolution:** 24 November 2022
- 4. Competent Parliamentary Committee:** N/A
- 5. Brief analysis/ assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

The ongoing recovery of the wolf and (to a lesser extent) of the bear and the lynx is leading to the resurgence of some social conflicts in the concerned areas, in particular with livestock farmers because of the increased risks of livestock damage in the areas concerned. The issue has previously been addressed by the European Parliament through parliamentary questions, petitions, [studies](#) and [hearings](#). A large variety of views have been expressed by members of the Parliament, including those supporting the current rules on large carnivores' strict protection and those asking for a change of those rules because of the damages caused by large carnivores to livestock farming in some areas in the EU.

The current resolution reflects these different views. On the one hand, it acknowledges the positive role played by EU nature legislation in the recovery of large carnivores. It supports the Commission's policy on coexistence, asking the Commission and the Member States to ensure long-term funding for both damage prevention and compensation. It acknowledges that the necessary instruments, derogation tools and flexibilities to address conflicts exist under the current legal and policy framework. On the other hand, the text emphasizes the impacts on livestock farming and rural communities. It welcomes and supports the Swiss proposal to downgrade the protection status of wolves under the Bern Convention, by emphasizing that the conservation status of the wolf at pan-European level justifies a mitigation of its protection status. It asks the Commission to carry out additional studies and analyses, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of preventive measures tested or implemented under LIFE and other EU funding mechanisms. Finally, the resolution asks the Commission to develop an assessment procedure to enable the protection status of populations in particular regions to be amended as soon as the desired conservation status of species has been reached.

- 6. Response to the requests in the resolution and overview of the action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission**

The return of the wolf is a challenge in several EU regions. Conflicts arise with livestock breeders in areas where the wolf was absent for decades. In such areas, the traditional knowledge and practices on managing and protecting grazing livestock in the presence of large carnivores have been lost since their extermination. The Commission agrees with the need to ensure a balanced coexistence between humans and large carnivores, by exploiting all the available tools under the current legal and policy framework (**paragraph 1**). A key priority to achieve such a coexistence

is to prevent and mitigate as much as possible the associated conflicts, using all the available tools, including, when justified, the targeted removal of some specimens of these species.

The Commission agrees with the need to effectively address the problem of predation of livestock (**paragraphs 2, 5, 12, 15 and 18**) and recalls that this has been an important priority of its policy on large carnivores, since the adoption of the Habitats Directive and the establishment of the [LIFE programme](#). It is important to recall that wolves (and other large carnivores) mainly prey on wild ungulates (red deer, roe deer, wild boar, chamois), but may also prey on livestock, mostly sheep, when wild ungulates are not available and sheep are not sufficiently protected. It is important to note that there are around 60 million sheep and 11,4 million goats in the EU and the impact of wolf predation in the EU, according to a [study](#) carried out for the European Parliament in 2018, concerns around 20 000 sheep per year. This corresponds to an average of 0.06% of the sheep in the concerned countries. More recent data collected for the Bern Convention show similar levels of overall predation. In some regions in Europe, however, the scale of predation poses a clear challenge.

Member States are invited to make the best use of the available EU and national funding opportunities. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) allows Member States to programme support for preventive actions and investments aimed at mitigating the risk of damages by large carnivores to livestock farming and at helping to resolve conflicts associated with the conservation of protected species. Several Member States are making use of this possibility and have included targeted interventions in their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans. As regards the EAFRD, this may cover preventive investments, for instance, into protective fences and costs for their maintenance, purchase of guard dogs and associated costs, training, technical assistance and monitoring, as well as communication and information of the wider public and cooperation between rural actors aimed at reconciling biodiversity conservation with farming. The latter can facilitate the dialogue among stakeholders about the need for reconciling the protection of biodiversity with human activities. The labour cost of livestock guarding is also eligible for support under agri-environmental-climate commitments. These activities can be funded up to 100% of their costs. The Member States can also support farmers' participation in risk management schemes that can compensate severe production losses. In addition, EU state aid rules allow Member States to compensate up to 100% of direct and indirect costs of damages caused by protected species as well as to finance up to 100% of preventive investments.

As regards the animal welfare of livestock animals (**paragraph 2**), the Commission underlines that livestock grazing outdoor are exposed to a number of health risks that differ from the health risks linked to indoor farming, and, unless appropriate management measures are taken by farmers, their normal mortality rate can be significantly high. For example in Ireland (where large carnivores are not present) the estimates of [average sheep flock mortality](#) rates range from 5-6% to 20-25%, depending on the age (ewes or lambs) and the environment (lowland or mountain). Causes of health problems and mortality for grazing livestock include infections, parasites, diseases or malformations, accidents, falls, lightening, and attacks by dogs. However, grazing outdoor has also significant positive impacts on health and animal welfare by offering opportunities for locomotion and express normal specific behaviour. In areas with large carnivores, if livestock is insufficiently supervised and protected, predation is an additional risk factor. Adopting the suitable livestock protection measures (e.g. shepherding) and increasing the supervision of the animals could significantly decrease all the above-mentioned causes of injuries and mortality, keeping welfare benefits of grazing for livestock and reducing, at the same time, the

impact of large carnivores. The new CAP Strategic Plans offer possibilities to support the relevant practices (e.g. shepherding through dedicated [eco-schemes](#)).

The Commission and the Member States regularly assess progress in achieving the conservation status for all species and habitat types covered by the Habitats Directive (**paragraph 3**). This is carried out every six years, under Article 17 of the directive, based on the data collected, analysed and reported by the Member States. [Technical guidelines](#) for this exercise have been elaborated by the Commission in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency and experts from national administrations and stakeholders. They provide a framework for Member States to organise their monitoring activities on the ground and report the collected data to the Commission, following agreed formats and criteria. For each species, data are reported *inter alia* on population size and trends, range surface and trend, available species' habitat and trend and future prospects in terms of pressures and threats (**paragraph 11**). For transboundary populations, Member States have the possibility to carry out joint assessments based on their coordinated monitoring systems and agreed assessment criteria. Member States will provide their next reports in 2025. The Commission will then pool all the data from national reports together, with the help of the European Environment Agency and the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity, and provide an aggregated assessment of species' status and trends for each EU biogeographic region. The results of this EU assessment will be published in 2026 in the 'State of Nature in the EU' report.

In the course of 2023, the Commission as recently indicated by its President, will also carry out an in-depth analysis of all available scientific and technical data, and all other relevant circumstances at hand, in order to assess whether further measures are needed, including for adapting the protection status of species of Community interest based on technical and scientific progress (**paragraphs 8 and 14**).

The Commission recalls that the proposed amendment for the down listing of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Bern Convention has not been adopted by the Standing Committee during its [42nd meeting](#) (**paragraph 4**). On 25 November 2022 the Council of the European Union adopted Decision No. 14861/2/22 opposing the Swiss proposal for down listing the wolf from Appendix II to Appendix III to the Convention. Consequently, the European Union and its Member States' delegation at the Bern Convention meeting acted accordingly and, as the required two third majority was not reached, that proposal was voted down by the Standing Committee.

Within the current framework of the Habitats Directive, Member States do enjoy considerable possibilities to derogate from the prohibitions of the strict protection regime. Article 16 of the directive allows Member States to enact derogations in order to prevent serious damage (in particular to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water and other types of property), in the interests of public health and public safety. It also allows this for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, or in order to allow, under specific conditions, the taking or keeping of certain specimens of the species enjoying strict protection, in limited numbers specified by the competent national authorities. Therefore, the existing rules on derogations make it possible to balance different interests against the conservation aims of the directive. Member States have the means to take action to derogate to the directive's provisions in order to address the specific challenges they are currently facing in relation to the wolf population, including local conflicts and circumstances, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The Commission needs to be kept informed of such measures, which need to be in line with the terms and conditions of the directive, but the decision on those measures solely

belongs to national or regional authorities. The Commission will not stand in the way of Member States making use of the various derogation possibilities offered to them, under the terms and conditions of the directive.

The Commission stands ready to further assist Member States facing coexistence conflicts, in particular by raising awareness on the [Commission guidance](#) on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest, adopted by the Commission in October 2021, which provides clarifications also on the scope and conditions to make use the derogations under Article 16 of the Habitats Directive (**paragraph 7**). A dedicated annex on the wolf (Annex III) has been added to this guidance, with the specific aim to better explain the interpretation and implementation of the strict protection provisions as well as the possibilities for derogations when dealing with this species. Specific recommendations on how to address coexistence conflicts have also been included. In its regular dialogue with the Member States' authorities and stakeholders, the Commission will continue to assist them in addressing any implementation problems related to large carnivores as well as other aspects of the Habitats Directive. At the same time, the Commission will continue to ensure that its guidance and recommendations are kept up to date, including on the interpretation of Articles 12 and 16 of the Habitats Directive (**paragraph 7**).

The Commission is fully aware that the return of large carnivores can be an additional challenge for livestock farmers in areas where these species have long been absent. It is therefore important to adequately support these farmers to address this challenge, and to implement appropriate practices to reduce the risks of predation (**paragraphs 9, 13 and 18**). Livestock protection measures have proven effective in preventing or significantly reducing predation risks when properly implemented and tailored to the specific context in which they are applied (see for example: relevant [guidance](#) elaborated under the LIFE Eurolargecarnivores project; [guidance](#) elaborated by the province of Florence; or the [field handbook](#) on prevention solutions elaborated under the regional stakeholders' platform in Grosseto). As regards the costs of predation, it is important to ensure an adequate compensation of damages for the affected farmers. This type of public support for both prevention and compensation aims to help the concerned farmers to face the risk of predation on their livestock, to share the burden and costs of the conservation of large carnivores, making coexistence with protected wildlife easier, in coherence with the integration principles and the objectives of both EU environment and agricultural policy. The [joint letter](#) sent by Commissioner Sinkevičius and Commissioner Wojciechowski to all EU Ministers for Agriculture and Environment in November 2021 provided a comprehensive picture of the possibilities and tools to address the conflicts associated to the conservation of large carnivores and invited Member States to make the best use of the available national and EU funding sources to support solutions for coexistence.

The new CAP, with more flexibility, allows Member States to design interventions that are most appropriate in each regional context. Based on the needs identified and the intervention strategy, the Member States have included targeted interventions in their plans. Support for preventive actions may be accompanied by support for training and advisory services.

The EU CAP Network also supports exchanges of best practices among stakeholders in this regard. Within the scope of activities of the [EIP-AGRI](#) (agricultural European Innovation Partnership), a Focus Group (a temporary group of selected experts focusing on a specific subject, sharing knowledge and experience) met in May and October 2020 to discuss how to promote innovative and sustainable practices to prevent and control wild animal damage on farms while at the same time protecting wildlife ([Wildlife and agricultural production](#)). Some of the outputs were ideas for local innovation projects funded by the EAFRD and carried out by "Operational Groups". The

Focus Group discussions also helped identify research needs from practice to be taken up by future research projects funded nationally or at EU level. As an example of Operational Group looking into innovative solutions for extensive livestock farming, a Spanish Operational Group has developed [a smart fencing system](#) to protect their cattle from wild animals' attacks.

The Commission also supports many relevant actions through the LIFE programme. Examples include the implementation of protection measures for livestock; the setting up of emergency teams; the establishment of volunteer and ambassador networks to assist livestock farmers; and the promotion of a participatory approach, with the active involvement of all parties concerned.

The Commission is engaged since long in organising opportunities for national authorities and different stakeholders to discuss the impacts of large carnivores as well as solutions and financing possibilities for preventive measures against attacks on livestock, notably through an [EU stakeholders' platform](#) on large carnivores and [regional platforms](#). In order to find the most suitable coexistence solutions, measures should be elaborated and implemented with the involvement of the stakeholders concerned and should be tailored to the specific local needs and priorities. The above-described approach is fully in line with the requests expressed by the European Parliament in the [resolution on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#).

The Commission stands ready to increase its efforts by expanding the geographical coverage and scope of large carnivores' stakeholder's regional platforms to cover the Member States and regions where on-going conflicts focused on wolves' presence are the highest. Better involving the relevant stakeholders in a participatory approach will provide opportunities to help improve the design and implementation of the most suitable preventive measures and other measures on coexistence.

In relation to impacts on tourism (**paragraph 10**), the Commission notes that in several areas of Europe large carnivores offer opportunities for rapidly increasing nature-based tourism (wolf watching, bear watching, photographing, guided walks to observe signs of presence, etc.). Such wildlife tourism can generate direct income and gains in employment in the concerned areas. The development of wildlife tourism can also lead to increased tolerance toward these species at the local level. Moreover, tourism can educate visitors about large carnivores' ecology and coexistence, raising awareness and promoting conservation efforts on a wider scale, including at international level. Considering the growing number of people interested in wildlife tourism, the Commission has supported the elaboration of dedicated guidelines (under the LIFE [Wolfalps EU](#) and LIFE [Dinalp Bear](#) projects) on how to develop responsible wolf-related and bear-related tourism, in order to avoid potential negative impacts (e.g. disturbance) on the conservation of these species.

The Commission acknowledges that traditional shepherding practices offer the best opportunities for the coexistence with the protected large carnivore species and for the maintenance of biodiversity-rich semi-natural habitats (**paragraph 12**). The Commission therefore considers that Member States should make the best use of the available tools to restore and support these practices, in accordance with the ecological requirements of the concerned habitats and , where appropriate, of modern tools and solutions (such as electric fences or other devices). The multiple values of mountain livestock farming and its contribution to environmental management, conserving biodiversity and cultural heritage is recognised by EU policies. Various policy and financial instruments are available to Member States. These instruments should be used appropriately and in synergy at national and regional level. This includes full and appropriate use of the opportunities provided by the CAP, the LIFE programme and national funds (State aid) for helping farmers and local communities to prevent or cope with the damages.

As regards the CAP, support is provided to farmers in mountain areas through payments for natural or other area-specific constraints (ANC). ANC payments aim at compensating farmers, in total or partially, for the additional costs and income foregone related to the constraints to which the agricultural production is exposed in the delimited area. Such compensation contributes primarily to ensure a fair income and allow farmers to continue agricultural land management in order to prevent land abandonment. Moreover, apart from support for preventive investments, under agri-environmental-climate management commitments, payments in environmentally beneficial grazing areas may cover for example additional labour costs for the maintenance of protective fences as well as for the maintenance of guard dogs. Under the EU CAP Network, knowledge exchange, innovation and EIP (European Innovation Partnership) implementation is supported with activities such as Focus Groups and Operational Groups or seminars and workshops. In particular, the EIP-AGRI Focus Group: [High Nature Value \(HNV\) - Farming profitability](#) investigated the main socio-economic threats to and the main opportunities for the continued existence of HNV farming.

In relation to the identification of and support for preventive measures to reduce attacks and the damage of predation of livestock by large carnivores (**paragraph 15**), the Commission recalls that under the LIFE programme almost 140 projects funded with EUR 166 million have been implementing activities ranging from livestock protection measures to the setting up of intervention/ emergency teams. LIFE projects also contribute significantly to supporting the active involvement of all the concerned actors through a participatory approach in order to find coexistence solutions. Projects address local problems of coexistence taking into account the regional and local context while considering best practices and lessons learnt from other regions and countries. There has been a steady increase in transboundary projects because most large carnivore populations in Europe are transboundary. Under the LIFE Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021-2024, large carnivores are a policy priority under the sub-programme for Nature and Biodiversity. The amount assigned to the sub-programme Nature and Biodiversity is linked to the annual budget allocation in line with the Multiannual Financial Framework. The LIFE programme uses a bottom-up approach and funds are not pre-allocated to specific topics. Independently from the allocation for nature and biodiversity, the uptake of projects on large carnivores will always depend on the quality of the related project proposals. LIFE projects are selected based on their impacts and replication potential. Applicants must include a strategy for the successful replication and/ or transfer of project solutions and results elsewhere. They need to include tasks that will pave the way towards the multiplication of the impact of the project's solutions and mobilise a wider uptake. This ensures that the successful measures are replicated.

The Commission will also launch a Horizon Europe Call (HORIZON-CL6-2024-FARM2FORK-01-1) on “Agro-pastoral/outdoor livestock systems and wildlife management”. Project results are expected to contribute to: innovative and sustainable practices and tools at landscape level to prevent and control negative consequences of interactions between livestock and wild animals to protect wildlife and pastoral/ outdoor production systems; recommendations/ policy advice on optimal management at EU level of wildlife and agro-pastoral systems; decision-making process on wildlife management and land planning participated by relevant stakeholders; and improved coordination across Europe in terms of wildlife management, surveillance and data collection systems (**paragraph 15**).

In the course of 2023, the Commission will work on the definition of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of damage mitigation measures investigated and/ or implemented in projects funded by the EU, including LIFE (**paragraph 15**).