



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
Directorate D – Biodiversity  
The Director

Brussels  
ENV.D.3/NWW/MC/FL

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**Subject: Request for assistance in addressing the presence of wolves (*Canis lupus*) in the national park De Hoge Veluwe**

Ref.: Your letter of 31 July 2023 (Ares(2023)5300256)

Dear Mr van Voorst tot Voorst,

Thank you for your letter of 31 July 2023 requesting assistance in the management of the presence of wolves in the national park Hoge Veluwe, which is a part of the Natura 2000 site “Veluwe” (NL3009017).

I would first like to recall that the wolf, as a native species of European fauna, is an integral part of our ecosystems and natural heritage and is therefore protected by EU legislation such as the Habitats Directive <sup>(1)</sup>. Large carnivores in Europe, including the wolf, are also protected by the Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats <sup>(2)</sup>, which entered into force in 1982 and was signed by 50 countries, including the EU Member States. Thanks also to such legal protection, wolf populations in Europe have been recovering for several decades, both in terms of number of individuals and their range, after having been eradicated from most European countries and regions in the past.

As to the Habitats Directive, its objective is among others to ensure that the species and habitat types they protect are restored to and maintained at a favourable conservation status throughout their natural range within the EU, while taking account of economic, social and cultural requirements and regional and local characteristics. To this end, the Directive requires Member States to implement two main types of measures. The first relates to the conservation of natural habitats and habitats of species and involves designation and management of Natura 2000 sites. The second concerns strict protection of species in their

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<sup>(1)</sup> [Council Directive 92/43/EEC](#)

<sup>(2)</sup> [Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats \(Bern Convention\) - Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats \(coe.int\)](#)

entire natural range within Member States, both inside and outside Natura 2000 sites. Within each country, national authorities regularly assess and report on the conservation status of the relevant habitat types and species. As regards the Netherlands, the wolf is listed in Annex II (requiring the designation and management of Natura 2000 sites) and Annex IV (strictly protected species) of the Directive. In the latest reporting under Article 17 of the Directive, the Netherlands has not reported data and information on the wolf <sup>(3)</sup>, although its presence in the country has been reported from other sources.

I understand from your letter and previous position paper of March 2022 <sup>(4)</sup> that you are concerned about the possible predation of wolves on mouflons in the national park De Hoge Veluwe and hence the impact on the ability to manage protected habitats in the Natura 2000 site by grazing. I would like to recall that the mouflon is not a native species in the Netherlands (nor in most of Europe) and is not a protected species under EU legislation, unlike the wolf, that is a species of Community interest. In your letter, you refer to applying derogations under Article 16 of the Habitats Directive, presumably to reduce predation on the mouflon so to keep their role in the management of protected habitats. The reference is also made to the Commission President's response to the European Parliament <sup>(5)</sup> on the follow-up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe <sup>(6)</sup>. This document underlines that the Commission agrees with the need (outlined in the latter Resolution) to ensure a balanced coexistence between humans and large carnivores by exploiting all the available tools under the current legal and policy framework.

According to Article 16 of the Habitats Directive, for certain objectives and under certain conditions, Member States may derogate from the strict protection regime that applies to the wolf. Derogations must be well justified, targeted and proportionate to the specific problem to be solved and the lack of other satisfactory alternatives to the killing, capture and/or disturbance of the protected species must be proven. Member States' authorities are primarily responsible for application of each derogation in line with the legal provisions of the Directive and, in case these are challenged before a national court, it is for the judicial authorities to verify on a case-by-case basis whether all the requirements have been met, including the absence of satisfactory alternatives. Member States must also report to the Commission every two years on the application of derogations <sup>(7)</sup>. In October 2021, the European Commission adopted a new guidance document on strict protection rules for animal species under the Habitats Directive <sup>(8)</sup>, in order to provide clarifications, interpretations and recommendations on the implementation of the legal provisions on species protection (Article 12) and derogation possibilities (Article 16). The document also contains an annex dedicated to the wolf which presents specific examples of the application of these rules to this species, as well as recommendations and examples of good practices in the management of associated conflicts, including as regards keeping grazing livestock in the presence of large carnivores.

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<sup>(3)</sup> [nature-art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/species/summary/?period=5&group=Mammals&subject=Canis+lupus&region=ATL](https://nature-art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/species/summary/?period=5&group=Mammals&subject=Canis+lupus&region=ATL)

<sup>(4)</sup> [Standpunt van Het Nationale Park De Hoge Veluwe ten aanzien van de wolf](#)

<sup>(5)</sup> [oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/doc](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/doc)

<sup>(6)</sup> [Texts adopted - Protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe - Thursday, 24 November 2022 \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/press-room/en/infobox-item-attachment-item/Texts-adopted-Protection-of-livestock-farming-and-large-carnivores-in-Europe-Thursday-24-November-2022)

<sup>(7)</sup> [ReportekEngine \(europa.eu\)](https://reportekengine.europa.eu)

<sup>(8)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/guidance/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/guidance/index_en.htm)

As regards protected grasslands or other habitats you refer to in your letter, it is for the Dutch competent authorities to establish and implement the necessary conservation measures ensuring appropriate management, for example by grazing or mowing, while respecting all obligations resulting from the Directive. Other Member States have dealt with similar problems, aiming to protect both the wolf and these habitat types.

Finally, I would like to thank you for sharing your concerns and comments with the European Commission. We are closely monitoring the state of nature in the Member States, and communications like yours are a valuable source of information for this purpose. However, as regards the presence and management of wolves in the Hoge Veluwe, I would suggest that you first contact the Dutch competent authorities who remain in charge of the application of the Habitats Directive in the Netherlands. My colleagues remain open to meet and discuss the issue with you in more detail as needed.

Yours sincerely,

*Electronically signed*

Humberto DELGADO ROSA

C.c.: Jakob Leidekker (Stichting Nationale Park Hoge Veluwe)