

Statement by Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Environment, on the issue of conservation of the wolf in Sweden

In view of the recent extensive media coverage of this issue in Sweden, I wish to clarify the position of the European Commission on the subject of licensed hunting of the wolf in Sweden.

The Commission has been in dialogue with the Swedish authorities on this issue for some time and I appreciate the fact that the authorities recognise the fragile status of the wolf population and is committed to improving conservation.

However, some elements of Swedish wolf policy appear not to be compatible with the management of strictly protected species in the European Union, especially the hunting of wolves when the species is not in favourable conservation status.

Given that licensed hunting of wolves in Sweden was imminent, I wrote to Mr. Carlgren, Minister of Environment, on 7 December 2010, to inform him of our position.

The Swedish wolf population is a small one, affected by both geographic isolation and inbreeding. As such, it is threatened by extinction and thus protected under EU environmental law through the Habitats Directive¹. All measures taken which affect the wolf in Sweden must be carefully considered and duly prepared before they are carried out in order to avoid detrimental impact on the population. Hunting of the wolf in the EU is strictly prohibited, with very narrowly defined derogations.

Several aspects of the Swedish wolf policy raise serious questions, for example:

- the unfavourable conservation status of the Swedish wolf population;
- the set ceiling for the number of wolves in Sweden;
- the licensed hunting of a strictly protected species without fulfilling the specific conditions for derogations set out by EU law;
- the reduced distribution area for wolves;
- the fact that the licensed hunting occurs before the announced introduction of wolves to improve the genetic status has taken place;
- the erroneous multi-annual practice that repeated licensed hunting may lead to.

I informed the Minister that in case licensed hunting is allowed by the Swedish authorities before the European Commission receives the required additional information, accompanied by the appropriate supporting scientific material, the Commission would envisage launching an infringement proceeding against Sweden for failure to comply with EU environmental legislation.

I have now received a reply from the Minister which my services are currently analysing. In the light of that analysis the Commission will decide how to proceed.

As a final point, I would like to draw a distinction between Sweden's use of a derogation for a licensed hunt² and its separate use of derogations for shooting of a more limited number of wolves in order to prevent serious damage to livestock³. The Commission's concerns relate to the former and not to the latter.

¹ Directive 92/43/EEC. Strict protection of the wolf is provided for in Article 12. Exceptions known as derogations are possible under Article 16 but strict conditions must be fulfilled.

² Under Article 16(e) of the Habitats Directive, 92/43/EEC.

³ Under Article 16(b) of the Habitats Directive