

JANEZ POTOČNIK
Member of the European Commission

REGERINGSKANSLIET
Miljödepartementet

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Ms Lena Ek
Minister for the Environment
Tegelbacken 2
103 33 Stockholm
SWEDEN

Dear Minister,

Lena Ek

You asked me on Monday why the revised Management Plan for the wolf was not what we had agreed on 10 July 2012.

It may be useful that I recall what I publicly stated in July, in terms of what needed to be delivered:

I have encouraged Sweden to continue to act in a transparent and open manner with all stakeholders. I see this management plan as an excellent opportunity for strengthening a process where all people would feel a real ownership of the policy. The more stakeholders are involved in the plan's development, the less controversial its implementation will be.

The management plan contains good elements but needs further improvement. In particular, the management plan should indicate how and when the favourable conservation status of wolves will be reached, what would constitute a sustainable population size, and what measures will be taken to improve the genetic status of the wolf population. The plan must be able to withstand scientific scrutiny, notably the definition of a minimum viable population of wolves. The European Commission is also looking forward to receiving the Swedish Government's assessment of the Large Carnivore Investigator's report.

My services have diligently kept this line in discussing with their Swedish counterparts at the meeting on 22 October 2012.

We have problems with both the process and the content of the Management Plan.

In terms of process, it would seem that the process of revision of the Management Plan was rushed and done under a strong time pressure. Those are the words of Professor Liberg himself, the scientist who is advising the EPA (Naturvårdsverket). This has a double consequence.

First, there was no time for effective stakeholders' involvement, and the many complaints that I receive every day are evidence of this lack of "real ownership of the policy" and of the controversial nature of its implementation.

Second, and more importantly, the time pressure meant that there was no scientific peer-review of the update to the Management Plan. I am therefore not convinced that the plan is able to withstand scientific scrutiny. In particular, I fail to understand why the update to the management plan and the scientific report by Professor Liberg has not been submitted to renowned Swedish geneticists such as Professors Laikre and Ryman, or to international experts (such as the international panel of scientists led by Professor Hansen that worked on the 2011 Large Carnivore Enquiry). You mentioned to me on Monday that there have been a lot of scientific discussions, but my point is that there seems to have been none on this very first attempt at defining favourable conservation status for the wolf population in Sweden.

Moving to the content of the revised Management Plan, the main failures of the 2 1/2-page document is the incorrect definition of favourable conservation status, and the lack of information on measures to improve the genetic status of the wolf population.

At the 22 October meeting, your officials were informed that the way the update defined favourable conservation status was not in line with the Habitats Directive, nor with the Article 17 Guidelines of the Commission. As was explained, there is confusion in the update between "Minimum Viable Population" and "Favourable Conservation Status" (which requires not only a larger population but also a number of elements such as range, habitats, connectivity and future prospects). Furthermore, the "toolbox" approach is too hypothetical to allow the viability of the wolf population on a long-term basis. In a sense, it is actually putting the cart before the horse, by making the status of the population dependent on future, unpredictable events.

The problem is compounded by the fact that there is no clarity on how the genetic status will be effectively improved. You specifically mentioned on Monday that translocations do not work, and I take your word on that, as indeed no translocation seems to have succeeded so far. You explained that immigration would be the solution, but then you referred to the stress caused to the Sami population, which means that natural immigration through the reindeer herding area is basically impossible.

Unless we can see some real and concrete steps to improve the genetic status of the wolf population, it would seem that the only tool available to Sweden is the killing of wolves, in order to artificially or statistically improve the genetic status of population. I would recall that Professor Liberg, in his report released on 17 December, stresses again that "Only harvesting the wolf population can never improve its genetic status in the long term, immigration is central for the reduction of inbreeding and loss of genetic variation".

Finally, I would also like to comment on three points mentioned during our discussion last Monday.

First, you mentioned a 19% reduction in the average inbreeding coefficient over one year. This seems to be at odds with Professor Liberg's own findings, which conclude that the reduction was over 5 years (2006-2011), and artificially due to the two 2007 migrations (the reduction is actually 3% over the past two years).

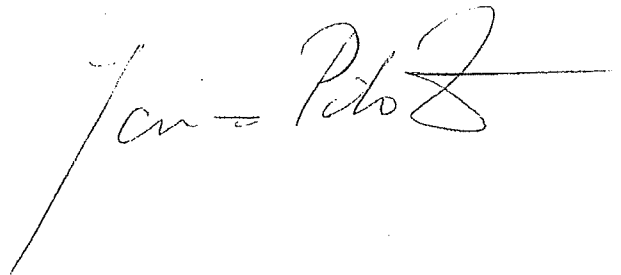
Second, you mentioned that you are constitutionally barred from giving instructions to the EPA as independent authority ("myndighet"). I would note that the Government can nevertheless adopt an amendment to the Hunting Ordinance (1987:905) to prevent any hunting of wolves.

Third, you mentioned that the plan is to have a selective hunt for a few wolves in two counties. The recent report from Professor Liberg does not identify the areas concerned, but mentions 5 to 10 packs, which is not really "a few wolves".

In conclusion, the information that I have so far indicates that a new hunt would not be in line with Sweden's obligations under the Habitats Directive. As you know, it is part of my duty to enforce compliance by Member States with EU environmental law.

I would urge you to adopt a modification of the Hunting Ordinance, so as to maintain the current ban on hunting of wolves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan-Peter", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.