



European Committee of the Regions

18 September 2017 - Exchange of views on

"Promoting coexistence with conflict species within the framework of the EU Nature Directives"

Statement read by the EC representatives

1. The Commission acknowledges that a few species protected under the EU Nature legislation (e.g. cormorants, starlings, wolves, bears) may cause damages and conflicts with human activities in certain situations. Nevertheless it is important to recall that most damages are caused by species that are not covered by EU Nature Directives (e.g. wild boars' damages to agriculture or deers' damages to forestry). The same applies to the potential risks to human safety: though a few accidents occasionally occur (e.g. with bears), most of the risks of attacks to humans actually come from domestic animals (e.g. dogs¹ or even cows²).
2. Member States authorities are responsible for wildlife management and for the implementation of the EU Nature legislation. There is nowadays a great deal of knowledge and experience on the different conflicts with wildlife species, on the possible ways to address them and on their effectiveness.
3. In relation to species protected under the Birds and Habitats Directive, the actions carried out to address the conflicts need to ensure the conservation of the affected species and the respect of the relevant legal framework. The European Commission has been contributing to the research, dissemination, promotion and support of good practices aiming at preventing and reducing possible conflicts caused by the protected species.
4. As regards large carnivores, these are species of Community interest, for which Member States have committed to restore and maintain a favourable conservation status. They play an important ecological role in the ecosystems and are an integral part of the European biodiversity heritage. The EU policy on large carnivores is based on the concept of coexistence between humans and large carnivores, sharing the same multi-functional landscapes.

¹ E.g. 32 people killed by dogs between 1984-2009 in Italy
http://www.sivemp.it/userfiles/documents/rivista/21_67_72_aggressivitabis.pdf

² E.g. 74 people killed by cows since 2000 in Britain
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/iacs/aiac/090615/aiac-paper-150601.pdf>

5. The recent recovery of several large carnivore populations has brought them back to some areas in Europe where they had been eradicated for several decades and people had lost their knowledge on how to coexist with them. This has contributed to an increase of conflicts in several Member States.
6. The return of large carnivores should not only be seen as a source of problems and conflicts but also as an opportunity to enrich the functioning of the concerned ecosystems and as an opportunity for the development of alternative sources of revenue for rural communities (wildlife tourism). For instance, under the LIFE Dinalp bear project, specific guidelines have been developed to introduce the concept of non-consumptive use of bears in the Northern Dinarics and to set specific recommendations for its development³.
7. The Habitats Directive envisages the necessary flexibility (derogations) including for species that are strictly protected. Member States authorities may authorise lethal control/culling, under certain conditions, namely to address public safety issues, or to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water and other types of property.
8. For strictly protected species, any lethal control/culling should be carried out within the limits set by the Habitats Directive and should be part of a comprehensive, integrated and consistent framework, including appropriate support for prevention measures (e.g. bear-proof garbage bins in villages, electric fences, livestock guarding dogs etc.), appropriate damage compensation systems, appropriate information, training and technical assistance to the affected people. It is also important that, when authorising lethal control, this should be targeting problem individuals and should aim at reducing the damages and the conflicts.
9. The above mentioned legal framework has been confirmed by the recent Fitness Check evaluation conducted by the Commission: the Habitats and Birds directives are fit for purpose and the Commission is not planning to amend their main text or their Annexes, but their implementation should be improved. This conclusion is also in line with the opinion expressed by the Committee of the Regions.
10. In order to improve the implementation of the Nature Directives, an Action Plan “for nature, people and the economy” was adopted on 27 April 2017 and is to be carried out in the period 2017-2019. The Plan was developed by closely associating the current President of the Committee of the Regions who was a member of the Project Team of Commissioners who drafted it. It includes 15 measures under four priority areas: Improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socio-economic objectives; Building political ownership and strengthening compliance; Strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies with EU funding instruments; Better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities. The contribution by the Member States, the regional

³http://dinalpbear.eu/wp-content/uploads/Odgovorno-opazovanje-medvedov-v-severnih-Dinaridih_EN_web.pdf

authorities and all the concerned stakeholders will be essential for the successful implementation of the Action Plan.

11. The Action Plan envisages several measures that are relevant to conflicts associated to large carnivores.

Under Action 1, the Commission will update and actively promote, in all EU languages, its guidance document on species protection rules under the Habitats Directive, to provide clarifications on the possibilities under the existing legal framework.

Under Action 6 the Commission will bring together public authorities and stakeholders from different Member States at biogeographical region level to address common challenges, including on cross-border issues. This may also cover large carnivores, whose populations are often transboundary.

Under Action 7, it is envisaged to further support stakeholder dialogue and information platforms to reduce conflicts related to large carnivores' conservation. Two new tenders have been recently published by the Commission aiming on the one hand to continue supporting the EU Platform on Large Carnivore and, on the other hand, to support the establishment of 2 to 3 regional or local stakeholders' platforms (pilot project from the EP).

Under Action 8, the Commission plans to propose a 10% increase in the LIFE budget dedicated to nature and biodiversity projects. LIFE will continue to play a significant role in supporting relevant projects to facilitate the conservation of large carnivores and their coexistence with people.

Under Action 9, the Commission *inter alia* will encourage the full and effective use of the financial resources available for Natura 2000 sites and wider biodiversity protection under the EARDP. This is also relevant for large carnivores and is linked to activities already carried out, under the EU Platform, to identify and promote ways to support coexistence through Rural Development measures. On 28 September DG AGRI, DG ENV and the European Network for Rural Development are organising a workshop on "Natura 2000: making an effective use of the support possibilities under the Rural Development policy". The Member States' environmental and Rural Development (RD) managing authorities will participate. The EU Platform secretariat will present the findings of the above mentioned work on the use of RD programmes to support coexistence with large carnivores.