

Concept note Northwestern European wolf cooperation

June 2024

Introduction:

Cooperation between the Northwestern European (NWE) countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands) on wolf related issues is very timely. We all face identical challenges to learn how to live together with wolves. To find the right balance between – on the one hand - protecting this returning species, promoting its favourable conservation status and fulfilling our legal duty (in accordance with the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive). And on the other hand, diminishing the risk and impact of conflicts between wolves and livestock or even human beings and addressing concerns from livestock farmers and citizens about the presence of wolves near their farms or houses.

Cooperation is very obvious too. The co-existence with wolves is not solely a national issue, to be addressed from a purely national point of view. Wolves can walk long distances, thereby crossing the borders between our countries. Wolf populations are often spread over several countries. It therefore makes sense to jointly monitor our shared wolf population, exchange information on our wolf related policies and experiences and, possibly and in the longer term, evolve to adjusted reporting to the European Commission (EC).

We are convinced that stronger cooperation will help all of us to address the challenges that each of us face and will show that our governments are jointly addressing the concerns that people have.

Following a side-meeting at the Nature Directors' Meeting (NDM) in Sweden in May 2023, the Netherlands had circulated a draft proposal containing elements for a plan on international wolf collaboration. After collecting written input from participating countries, this proposal has been shared in September 2023 and discussed during two working level meetings with all countries (except Luxemburg) in April and May 2024. Based on the discussions we had during our meeting, the comments have been incorporated and the elements of our plan (including the objective, goals, results, topics as well as the project structure and organizational arrangements) have been modified accordingly for adoption as further guidance for our wolf cooperation.

Based on this concept note, the working groups will start their work before the Summer break and provide their input to the plan in the months to follow.

Strategic objectives:

- Promoting a favourable conservation status of the shared wolf population in the biogeographical regions covered by the participating countries
- Improving human (and animal) co-existence with wolves in the participating countries

Operational objectives:

- Applying a coordinated approach in order to reach a favourable conservation status of the shared wolf population in the biogeographical regions covered by our countries, in line with the EU Habitats Directive
 - a. Better insight into (the conservation status of) our shared wolf population is a precondition to achieve this objective
- Exchanging information and experiences to optimize wolf related policies in our countries, including sufficient attention to improve co-existence with human activities

Topics to be part of our cooperation:

1. Joint monitoring programme (exchanging data on wolf occurrence, sharing and possibly developing common standards and methods for joint monitoring etc.)
2. Explore the feasibility of joint reporting to the EC about the conservation status, in accordance with art. 17 of the EU Habitats-directive
3. Exchange of policies and experiences with livestock damage prevention and compensation (including possibly developing a common regime on wolf-fences, conditions for

derogation/management of wolves, payment of damages and subsidies), including stakeholder management and communication

4. Exchange knowledge on defining, dealing with and communicating about 'problem-wolves'

Result:

- Developing concrete (SMART) action points and a road map how and when to reach the goals, including an overview of the resources needed/committed.
- The plan will make clear which of the goals we aim to achieve first (what we prioritize) and what (topics) will be dealt with at a later stage.
- We aim for a draft of the plan to be ready before the end of this year, to be approved by the Steering-group. The implementation of the plan will then start as of 2025.

Project structure:

- Two working groups will deal with the four topics mentioned above: one on monitoring and reporting (topics 1 and 2), the other on livestock damage prevention/compensation and 'problem-wolves' (topics 3 and 4).
- The working groups will further elaborate the topics and make clear what we aim to achieve (in broad terms), what we consider as most important benchmarks and milestones and what timelines we follow.
- In cases where this is relevant, connections will be made with other transboundary wolf related initiatives, including the Transboundary Wolf Meeting network (in order not to multiply initiatives).
- Each working group shall have one coordinator to lead the work. The role of coordinator could be rotated between the working group members. Members of each working group shall decide internally how to organize their work, how to divide the roles and how often to convene.
- There will be one overall coordinator for both working groups and the plan, possibly alternating periodically, starting with NL. The overall coordinator will act as first contact person for the Steering-group.
- One coordinating Steering-group consisting of Nature Directors (or equivalent delegates) of the participating countries¹. The Steering-group shall discuss the work and results of the working groups semi-annually (during side-meeting at NDM's, and/or other meetings to be organized separately). It shall provide guidance for next steps of the working groups. The chair of the Steering-group will alternate periodically, starting with NL.

Organizational arrangements:

- The Steering-group shall be attended by a maximum of 2 representatives per country. The plenary meetings on working level shall be attended by a maximum of 3 representatives per country.
- The coordinators of the working groups shall lead the drafting process to provide input on their topics for the plan. The overall coordinator shall lead the drafting process of the plan, in close cooperation with the coordinators of the working groups. Final draft input for the plan from both working groups will be discussed during a plenary meeting on working level. All participating countries bear joint responsibility for its development and finalization.
- From each Steering-group meeting, a brief report containing the main conclusions and actions to be taken shall be circulated to all participating countries. Drafting of the report shall be done by the country chairing the Steering-group.
- From each plenary meeting on working level, a brief report containing the main conclusions and action points shall be circulated to all participating countries. Drafting of the report shall be done by the country providing the overall coordinator, starting with NL.
- Working language of both the Steering-group and working groups is English. The plan will be written in English.

¹ Flanders and Wallonia will be considered as two separate countries/parties for this cooperation, each having their own representatives in the Steering-group and working groups.

- National documents of relevance to all participating countries (with best practices for example) will be shared with the other members, translated into English. If translation of the whole document appears to be too difficult or time-consuming, they will be delivered in the original language, accompanied by a summary in English.
- The cooperation on this plan will start with the current participating countries. Decisions on possibly inviting other countries to join the cooperation will be taken at a later stage.
- Participating countries will decide at a later stage when to inform the EC of our wolf cooperation.
- This cooperation platform is first and foremost meant to discuss issues directly related to the plan and the implementation thereof. Actual (political) wolf related developments (like the EC proposal to reduce the international protection status of the wolf) could be discussed only in case these developments have an impact on the scope and extent of our (long-term) Northwestern European wolf cooperation.

Annex:

- An overview of the project structure including the names of representatives per country is attached to this concept note.