



Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/43/EEC as regards the protection status of the wolf (*Canis lupus*)

(COM(2025) 106 final – 2025/0058 (COD))

(C/2025/3204)

Rapporteur-general: **Josep PUXEU ROCAMORA**

Referral	Council, 25.3.2025 European Parliament, 31.3.2025
Legal basis	Articles 43(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted at plenary session	30.4.2025
Plenary session No	596
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	154/9/17

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. Negative interactions between inhabitants of rural areas, livestock farms and wolves in the EU need to be reduced by fostering and managing their coexistence.

1.2. Scientific and technical evidence shows that management models based on the disposal of wolves are ineffective in reducing damage level because they maintain an ongoing conflict between livestock farming and wolves, except in cases where so many wolves are disposed of that their conservation status is adversely affected, which violates Council Directive 92/43/CEE ⁽¹⁾.

1.3. However, models based on preventive measures, which are consistent with the need to preserve wolves' favourable conservation status, have been scientifically proven to be a suitable alternative that can reduce conflict and make progress in achieving coexistence between wolves and livestock farming. To that end, suitable funding frameworks need to be leveraged to help develop these measures, as pointed out in information report NAT/825 ⁽²⁾.

1.4. In this regard the EESC recommends the following:

1.5. Leverage suitable funding measures to promote an improved, effective and viable model for coexistence between wolves and livestock farming.

1.6. Encourage the development of applied research into techniques for protecting livestock in various types of livestock farms.

1.7. Carry out individual assessments of high-risk and/or severely damaged livestock farms in order to implement the most appropriate livestock protection measures.

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7).

⁽²⁾ EESC information report on the *Benefits of extensive livestock farming and organic fertilisers in the context of the European Green Deal*.

- 1.8. Advise farms on how to implement and monitor livestock protection measures.
- 1.9. Quickly provide compensation for all types of damage, not just death, i.e. scattered herds, miscarriages and lost profit.
- 1.10. Promote forums where livestock farmers can discuss their experiences of implementing livestock protection measures.
- 1.11. Use the best available techniques to analyse signs and evidence of wolf attacks on livestock farms to determine with the least possible margin of doubt whether the attack was actually carried out by wolves or by wild dogs.
- 1.12. Encourage the recruitment of professional herders to stay with livestock in areas or at times of the year with a greater risk of damage.
- 1.13. Facilitate rearing and provide livestock farmers with livestock guardian dogs to avoid wolf attacks.
- 1.14. Encourage the use of professionals to care for livestock during transhumance.
- 1.15. Support training of responsible public officers on assessing damage for and on offering the proper information and support to livestock farmers.
- 1.16. Develop a coordinated protocol for the selective disposal and/or removal of individual wolves to provide guidance and make it easier to correctly and appropriately apply the exceptions to the species protection rules, in compliance with EU and national legislation (the effectiveness of the measure adopted should subsequently be monitored and assessed).
- 1.17. Promote the formation of a dialogue on wolves at EU level, including the EU institutions, the Member States, municipalities and local authorities, naturalists, farming and livestock organisations, scientific bodies and NGOs.
- 1.18. Recognise that civil society involvement at local and regional level is essential for decision-making and management.
- 1.19. Encourage the sharing of scientific knowledge about wolves and the difficulties in managing them.
- 1.20. Develop information campaigns aimed at livestock sectors on the options for cohabitation and for reducing conflicts with wolves, and on the funding available.
- 1.21. Promote the use of best practices for observing wolves.
- 1.22. Develop information campaigns aimed at people visiting or doing sport in livestock areas to warn them about the presence of livestock guardian dogs, explaining to them what the dogs are doing there and how to behave around them.

2. General comments

- 2.1. This opinion responds to the decision made in December 2024 by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, at the proposal of the European Union, which changed the status of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Annex II ('strictly protected fauna species') to Annex III ('protected fauna species'). The change entered into force three months after it was adopted.
- 2.2. On 7 March, the European Commission presented its proposal for a directive amending the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) as regards the protection of wolves (COM(2025) 106 final - 2025/0058 (COD)).

2.3. The Commission proposal (COM(2025) 106 final) aims to amend Directive 92/43/EEC by moving all wolf populations in the EU to Annex V ('animal and plant species of community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures'), which would allow Member States to take more flexible management approaches. At the same time, the proposal maintains the obligation to ensure a favourable conservation status for the species.

2.4. Wolves will continue to be a protected species, and the Member States will have to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for them through management and conservation measures.

2.5. The EESC takes note of the Commission's proposal and stresses that the change of legal status must go hand in hand with strong guarantees to ensure that the favourable conservation status of wolf populations is maintained in line with Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) - particularly considering that in over half of the EU's biogeographical regions where wolves are present, their conservation status remains unfavourable, while Member States must be provided with more effective tools to manage local conflicts and foster coexistence with rural communities and extensive livestock farming.

2.6. Their presence helps to control populations of wild ungulates (deer, roe deer, wild boar, chamois and elk, depending on the region) through selective predation, promoting an ecological balance.

2.7. According to the European Commission's 2020 state of nature report, based on data from the Member States, wolf populations – once eradicated in most regions and countries in the first half of the 20th century – are now stable or are increasing and recolonising former ranges. In some countries, wolves have a favourable conservation status, while other countries face risks of overpopulation or shrinking ranges.

2.8. However, this positive trend is not being played out consistently: Spain is the only EU Member State where a wolf population has recently died out, in Sierra Morena, which shows that there are populations in decline, reinforcing the need to continue protecting them. In addition, Iberian wolf populations have low genetic variability, making them more vulnerable to risk factors than other, smaller – but more genetically diverse – populations.

2.9. This situation can be partly explained by the legal protection and more favourable public attitudes, as well as by the restoration of their prey (species such as cervids and wild boar) and of forest cover. Rural depopulation in certain European regions has contributed to the expansion of the wolf population.

2.10. The return of wolves to regions where they had been absent for decades poses a significant challenge to Member States, as the species is often associated with various types of conflicts, particularly with regard to the damage caused to extensive livestock farming, which creates social conflict in the rural communities affected.

2.11. The impact of wolves on livestock farming at EU level and the overall damage to livestock may seem tolerable at Member State level, but their concentration at local level can put considerable pressure on certain areas, inflicting direct and indirect economic losses that are hard to quantify and causing emotional disorders in farmers.

2.12. According to data reported by the Member States between 2013 and 2018, wolves still face a variety of threats: illegal shootings, poisoning, collisions with infrastructure and interactions with agricultural activities.

Ensure a favourable conservation status for wolves throughout the EU that is compatible with social and economic activities in rural areas

2.13. To ensure the favourable conservation of wolves in the EU, without undermining socio-economic activities in rural areas, the EESC recommends that Member States:

- step up monitoring of the species in areas into which they may extend their current ranges;
- broaden wolf monitoring programmes to learn more about their distribution, the age structure of packs and populations, their behavioural habits, non-accidental mortality and their interactions with human activities;

- improve programmes for learning more about the effectiveness of various techniques (based on aversion and deterrents) that may be able to reduce the amount of damage the species does to livestock farming;
- increase information and awareness-raising programmes in areas that wolves are expected to recolonise in order to change society's perception and prevent and avoid potential negative interactions with extensive livestock farming;
- encourage wolves to range in areas with more wild ungulates and where extensive livestock farming practices have been reduced or have disappeared and where sport hunting is not able to control the expansion of these populations;
- promote the capture and removal of dogs from the natural environment in suspected cases of hybridisation or mixed wolf and dog packs;
- carry out information and monitoring campaigns to avoid intentional hybridisation with dogs;
- conduct information campaigns between sectors involved in managing the rural environment on the ecological, social, administrative and criminal consequences of using illegal methods to kill wolves;
- implement alternative damage-prevention measures, including techniques for preventing and mitigating predation on farms;
- encourage the organisation of operations to monitor and create deterrents to illegal practices in areas with a record of high levels of conflict due to damage to livestock; population control should be carried out under the supervision of the relevant administrations and in accordance with scientific criteria.

Brussels, 30 April 2025.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Oliver RÖPKE
