

President Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission
Wetstraat / Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussel

Leeuwarden / Ljouwert, 6 February 2023,

Subject: Help us to stop the increase in wolf attacks on livestock in Fryslân

Dear President von der Leyen

I write you because of the increasing number of attacks by wolves on livestock in our region. In a very short time hundreds of animals have been killed by wolves. These losses cause anxiety among our inhabitants in the rural areas and feelings of mistrust among a significant proportion of our population towards us, public authorities and politicians.

Since the first wolf crossed the border in 2015, the population has gone up dramatically in the Netherlands, as have the attacks on livestock. Our inhabitants do not understand why we politicians in Fryslân cannot do more to stop these wolf attacks. They blame us for our inaction, although we help them with protective measures and advice. We feel rather powerless, since the wolf is strictly protected under EU law; individual specimens can only be killed in exceptional cases. This means that we must accept much material and emotional damage, before a problem wolf eventually can be taken out.

Most nature areas in Fryslân are relatively small and close to where our people and livestock are living. Some of the larger nature areas, e.g. the Waddensea or the Alde Feanen are wet and not very suitable for wolves. We do not have an abundance of natural prey animals, such as deer or wild boars. We are the end of the mainland of Northwest-Europe, the place where expansion of the reclaimed territory of wolves stops eventually.

The FNP (Frisian National Party) is a regional party in government in Fryslân, the Netherlands. We stand for a good cohabitation with the flora and fauna around us, but realise that in a part of Europe that is so densely populated, we sometimes have to control the population of one species to save another.

In Fryslân sheep and cattle do not only provide an income to many inhabitants, but these animals also maintain our landscape, our heathlands, moors and peatlands. The typical grassy landscapes of Fryslân are the habitat of endangered meadow birds like lapwing and godwit. These lands can only be maintained by grazing livestock. Sheep are also essential to keep our dikes in good shape, which is essential for the safety of our land.

The increasing wolf attacks on the livestock of our farmers combined with rigid rules on population management create a lot of tension within our communities. The region of Fryslân has a scheme in place that supports livestock holders with protective measures and provides compensation for farmers that loose animals in wolf attacks. We also have a project group of stakeholders to share best-practices and the region provides free advice for livestock-holders on how to protect the animals. But this does not stop the wolf attacks on livestock, precisely as there is not a lot of natural prey available here.


We were hopeful last November when you wrote a letter to Christian Democratic Members of the European Parliament, in which you wrote that you ordered an in-depth analysis of whether the current protection status of wolves is still justified. In the same month, the European Parliament also asked for better protection of livestock against large carnivores and a reassessment of the conservation status of the wolf.

Last week twelve European environment ministers called for upholding the protection status of the wolf in Europe. It is remarkable that of these twelve member states, four (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Spain and Greece) have wolf populations that are under the less strict protection regime of Annex V of the Habitats Directive. In these European populations, hunting for population management is allowed. Under the strict regime of Annex IV currently in place in Northwest-Europe, it is not.

We urge you to not let distract you by the letter of the environment ministers and soon publish the in-depth analysis of the protection status. It is our expectation that soon, the state of conservation of the wolf in Northwest-Europe will no longer be unfavourable anymore. At that particular moment, the EU should be able to quickly adapt its rules to the new reality, change the status of the Northwest-European population, and allow the hunting of the wolf for population management. Additionally we need clear guidance from the EU about the assessment of the conditions under which competent authorities are allowed to take out specific problem wolves.

We thank you for your attention to this matter of great importance.

Yours sincerely,



Sijbe Knol,
Leader of FNP Fryslân.