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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Management of Large Carnivores: Challenges and Solutions
- Information from the Slovenian delegation

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Slovenian delegation on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 19 December 2019.

Management of Large Carnivores: Challenges and Solutions

- Information from the Slovenian delegation -

Nature conservation legislation, in particular the Habitats Directive, has greatly helped to improve the status of populations of strictly protected species. Management practices have improved in recent decades, *inter alia*, with the support of various LIFE projects. These practices include high-quality monitoring, livestock protection measures, damage compensation schemes, the setting-up of emergency teams, stakeholder awareness-raising and involvement, and conflict management in relation to brown bear, wolf and lynx populations as an essential part of a complex management system.

Through a long and continuous tradition of coexistence with large carnivores in Slovenia (in particular the brown bear, wolf and lynx) we have succeeded in establishing a positive trend in the brown bear and wolf populations in the continental region, and their territory is expanding. In Slovenia, the rate of illegal killing of large carnivores, including poaching, remains negligible.

Despite the regular involvement of stakeholders in the management system, the positions of various interest groups vary and are sometimes even extreme. In spite of this, we are convinced that the dialogue with and involvement of all relevant stakeholders within a complex management system helps to create a framework for discussion and cooperation and helps to build trust among all stakeholders. If such a vulnerable system were to collapse, there is a strong probability that it would trigger criminal proceedings. This is why it is important to interpret the provisions of the Habitats Directive in a smart but legally correct way to ensure the achievement of its goals.

A stronger EU approach is essential for the proper implementation of the management of large carnivores at the population level. It is imperative to have good, reliable information before decisions are made, and active coordination and cooperation between Member States, especially regarding the proper implementation of flexibilities, are also important.

The Commission has presented and circulated the new draft version of the guidelines. Member States and stakeholders can submit comments until mid-January. That is why we are addressing the issue here today. From our point of view, it is crucial that the guidelines provide an appropriate framework for properly managing the population size of strictly protected species when they already have a good conservation status. In this respect, we call for a joint effort from Member States facing similar challenges to discuss and submit comments on the new draft guidelines.

- ⇒ We call on the Commission to explore possibilities in the framework of the current process of updating the EU guidance document to take better account of the situation in the Member States. In particular, economic, social and cultural requirements need to be duly taken into account in management decisions on sustaining populations with a favourable conservation status in cases of further growth which has a negative impact on social acceptance by local stakeholders.
- ⇒ The guidance document should give clear assistance for the proper use of derogations in the Member States. In cases where it is obvious that a certain population has a favourable status with a stable positive trend and is not regarded as threatened, we believe there is no reason for a strict derogation system.
- ⇒ Accordingly, we would invite the Commission and the Member States to explore ways of using the Habitats Directive such that management measures in the sense of the Article 14 could apply to populations which have a favourable status and are expanding above the social acceptance threshold.