



RAAD VOOR DIERENAANGELEGENHEDEN

COEXISTING WITH WOLVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Contents

Process	3
Guide for readers	4
1. Introduction	5
1.1. Background	5
1.2. Strategy	6
1.2.1. <i>Background information</i>	6
1.2.2. <i>Social dialogue</i>	6
1.2.3. <i>Other interviews and sources</i>	7
1.2.4. <i>Scope</i>	7
2. Council's reflection	8
2.1. Reflection on the social dialogue	8
2.1.1. <i>Words matter</i>	8
2.1.2. <i>Speaking and listening in a safe dialogue</i>	9
2.1.3. <i>Wolves make an impression</i>	10
2.1.4. <i>Room for sharing experiences and expressing emotions</i>	11
2.1.5. <i>Need for knowledge and information</i>	12
2.1.6. <i>Four discourses</i>	13
2.2. The broader context of the social dialogue	14
2.2.1. <i>Public surveys</i>	14
2.2.2. <i>Media analyses</i>	16
2.2.3. <i>Political environment</i>	17
2.3. The animal perspective	17
2.4. Perspectives for coexistence with nature	20
2.5. Three domains	22
3. Conclusions and recommendations	25
3.1. Conclusions	25
3.2. Recommendation	26
Bibliography	30
Appendix 1. The advisory process	32
Appendix 2. Policies of other European countries	34
Appendix 3. Three scenarios for coexisting with wolves	36
Appendix 4. Possible research topics	38
Composition of the Council	39

This report has two external annexes.

Process

This advisory report from the Council on Animal Affairs (Dutch acronym RDA, or 'the Council') was prepared¹ by a forum of Council members comprising Prof. L.A. den Hartog (chair), G.C. Six, Dr H.H. Bartelink, J. van der Ven, Prof. G.M. van Dijk and Prof. C. Smit (external member). The report is a product of the Council as a whole. The forum held twelve meetings for the purpose of preparing the report. The Council's advisory report is based on a social dialogue, a media analysis, public surveys, and input from a knowledge team and various experts from outside the Council.

The forum was supported by RDA secretary-director M.H.W. Schakenraad and committee secretary R.L. van Oudheusden. This advisory report of the Council was produced at the request of the ministers of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and Nature and Nitrogen Policy.

External parties and individuals whom the Council interviewed or otherwise involved in the process did not participate in the writing of this advisory report.

Previous and particularly relevant RDA advisory reports in the context of the current advisory report are:

- 2012 - *'Duty of Care, Naturally. On the welfare of semi-captive and wild animals.'*
- 2017 - *'Weighing Wildlife Welfare. Application of the wildlife assessment framework.'*
- 2022 - *'Animals in the House of Thorbecke. The role of local and regional authorities in relation to animal welfare.'*
- 2022 - *'Dilemmas in Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation. Caring for wild animals in need of help.'*

¹ Appendix 1 explains how the advisory process was designed.

Guide for readers

Chapter 1 outlines the background to this advisory report, the questions it set out to answer and the methodology followed. In Chapter 2, the Council reflects on the information collected for the purposes of this advisory report. Chapter 3 presents conclusions and recommendations.

Important sources for this report were the social dialogue which the RDA organised together with Publiquest, and a survey conducted by a knowledge team compiled of external experts. The report of the dialogue (Publiquest, 2024) and the results of the knowledge team's survey (*Vragen en Antwoorden*, Prins & de Bie, 2024) are included as external annexes to this report and referred to where applicable. Both reports will be published on the RDA's website.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Wolves returned to the Netherlands several years ago. Following the arrival of a few solitary animals, the first wolf settled in the Veluwe region in 2018, followed by a second one – and cubs – in 2019. Several pairs of wolves and packs formed in subsequent years. By spring 2024, there were nine known packs in the Netherlands, plus a number of solitary animals (BIJ12, 2024a).

In response to the arrival of wolves in the Netherlands, public authorities and organisations initiated various campaigns and measures to inform the public, provide support to protect livestock, and compensate damage where necessary. In 2019, the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) drafted an Interprovincial Wolf Plan, to which an addendum was added in 2023 (BIJ12, 2024b). Legal analyses and a fact-finding study (Jansman et al., 2021) were also conducted. The National Wolf Consultation was launched in 2020, in which various organisations come together to discuss national and international issues, develop policy advice, and share knowledge. The participants in this consultation jointly ensure the implementation of various measures and draft 'action protocols' in response to acute problems. A number of provincial wolf committees have also been established. There are also various experts on wolves, such as wolf consultants and specialised loss assessors. Finally, there are information points for questions about wolves, grant schemes, and the like. As of April 2024, the website BIJ12 (the implementing organisation of the provinces) also offers many pages of information about wolves (BIJ12, 2024c).

The return of this species has triggered much debate and evokes a range of reactions. Some people welcome the return of the wolf, others are concerned. The tone of the social debate is often fierce. The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Minister for Nature and Nitrogen Policy asked the Council on Animal Affairs (RDA) to organise a broad social dialogue about the position of the wolf in the Netherlands. The ministers asked the Council to explore what is needed to enable society to coexist with wolves in the Netherlands during these talks, and to produce an advisory report to this end. They asked the Council to pay specific attention to the position of the wolf in Dutch nature, the public's fear of the wolf, and the protection of livestock from the wolf. The present document describes the outcomes and results of the social dialogue and presents the Council's advice in regard to coexisting with wolves in the Netherlands.

1.2. Strategy

To prepare this advisory report, the Council consulted various sources and held discussions with representatives of a large number of relevant organisations and experts. The aforementioned social dialogue was also an important part of the advisory strategy.

1.2.1. Background information

The present advisory report of the Council on Animal Affairs draws firstly on the discussions held as part of the social dialogue. To gather background information, the Council spoke to some forty experts and organisations in the Netherlands and abroad. Their expertise in social dialogue, coexistence with predators, and the social context was used to prepare for the dialogue meetings. The Council also referred to a 2022 study entitled *What's next for the wolf in the Netherlands? An exploratory study into the opportunities for a social dialogue about the future of the wolf in the Netherlands* written by De Bie, Bergers, & Gilden (2022) and commissioned by Alcedo Consultancy VOF. This report provided a good starting point for developing the dialogue plan.

1.2.2. Social dialogue

The Council asked Publiquest to moderate the dialogue meetings. Five meetings were organised in two tracks, being national and local dialogues. The two national dialogue meetings were conducted with representatives of organisations at the national level. The motivation for the choice of participants was based on the above report by De Bie, Bergers & Gilden (2022). Three dialogue meetings were also held at the local level, with participants selected from regions where wolves are currently active. Each of these local meetings was organised in collaboration with a local party such as a village council. The meetings were held in Elspeet (where wolves settled some time ago), Dwingeloo (where they are increasingly common) and Austerlitz (where they were recently spotted for the first time). The social dialogue was designed to bring together the full breadth and plurality of insights and perspectives on this issue, with an emphasis on quality of the discussions.

Representatives of organisations mainly contributed their knowledge of and standpoints on wolves in the Netherlands to the national meetings. The local residents who participated in the community meetings mainly shared their own experiences, the daily dilemmas they faced, and their thoughts, feelings and emotions about coexisting with wolves. The combined dialogue meetings provide insight into the various interests, underlying values, and perspectives on wolves, and form valuable building blocks for the advisory report. Detailed information on the structure of the dialogue meetings is included in the final report of the social dialogue (see External Annex 1).

1.2.3. Other interviews and sources

The Council also consulted various sources, parties and experts. This included discussions with representatives of the Association of Provincial Authorities, a number of individual provinces, and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). Due to their roles and powers in relation to this issue, we informed these parties of the design of, and background to, the social dialogue. Wolves were also covered in a broad public survey carried out by the Council on Animal Affairs under the title *State of the Animal*, the results of which were discussed at the April 2023 anniversary congress. The Council called in the help of an external knowledge team to develop the dialogue and support the Council forum that prepared the advisory report. This team provided an independently established evidence base, which was described in the exploratory study by De Bie, Bergers & Gilden (2022) as very important for conducting a successful dialogue. Finally, media analyses on the topic of wolves and an analysis of existing public surveys were also used as input for the report. Furthermore, the Council discussed the structure of the social dialogue meetings, the process, and the interim results extensively during its plenary meetings. During the advisory process, various individuals and parties reached out to the Council of their own accord. The Council made sure to contact all these persons.

1.2.4. Scope

This advisory report amounts to a broad exploration of what is required to be able to coexist with wolves in the Netherlands. The Council does not address the recent debate on the 'level of protection' from wolves and whether or not to lower this level in Europe. The minister's request to the Council did not address this particular matter. Nor did the Council conduct a legal analysis.

2. Council's reflection

In this chapter, the Council reflects on the information collected for, and the experience gained from, this advisory report. We start with a review of the social dialogue, followed by the social perspective, the animal perspective and the relationship with nature.

2.1. Reflection on the social dialogue

To pay due attention to the plurality of perspectives and views, the Council reflects below on the various themes that were raised during the dialogue. It is important to note here that the personal stories related by the participants in the local meetings made a big impression on all involved. This was particularly the case when these concerned first-hand experiences whereby the participants visibly and audibly expressed their emotions, thoughts and feelings. These stories remain powerful even after their incorporation into the broader storyline and perspective.

2.1.1. Words matter

It is important to use the right words when talking about wolves. It became very clear how words matter during both the national and local dialogues. Terms like 'wolf huggers' and 'wolf haters' can lead, often unintentionally, to stigmatisation, hardening of attitudes, and polarisation (involving contradictions that may or may not actually exist). The Council was also challenged about its choice of words and wording during the dialogue sessions. The words used in this advisory report may also, unintentionally, give rise to certain reactions. The Council itself refers to 'wolves' as much as possible, rather than 'the wolf', because the use of the singular does not only describe the animal, but is also used as a symbol with negative connotations. When formulating the starting question of the meetings '*(How) can we coexist with wolves in the Netherlands?*', we deliberately put 'how' between brackets². That leaves room for people to consider whether coexistence with wolves is *even possible* at all. This wording was itself the subject of discussion several times during the dialogues. Participants who welcome the return of the wolf feel that the use of brackets ignores the fact that wolves are already living in the Netherlands and are legally protected.

² With this choice, the Council widened the scope of the ministers' request for information during the dialogue meetings. The present advisory report responds more closely to the ministers' original request for information.

2.1.2. *Speaking and listening in a safe dialogue*

In the context of wolves, the experience of fear is often related to the physical safety and mental safety (state of mind) of people and the animals they keep. However, fear can also be caused by a lack of social safety. The Council noted during the meetings that some people experienced a sense of 'social unsafety'. These fears were clearly evident during the dialogue sessions. Some invitees declined to attend meetings because they feared polarisation and confrontations with people who held different views. They did not feel safe enough to tell their own perspective, were afraid of negative media attention, or they did not want to take a clear position within their community. Others were willing to attend, but did not dare to come alone. They brought partners or acquaintances to the meeting to provide them with support. This occurred both among people who felt stigmatised as 'pro-wolf' or 'anti-wolf', and those with a more neutral standpoint. In hindsight, most participants were glad they had attended the meeting and said they felt safe and respected during it. A number indicated that they had talked more than they thought they would, and enjoyed being able to share their stories in this setting.

Regardless of their views on wolves, people have concerns about the tone of the discussion about wolves. Fierce and harsh words are spoken and written by people with various perspectives of wolves. Some of the participants at the local meetings shared their personal experiences of being threatened, both online and in real life on the street, or even at their homes.

All the participants agreed that nobody wanted a polarised debate. Everyone faced different dilemmas, but they agreed that they wanted to find a solution together.

During the three local dialogues, the participants demonstrated a willingness to listen to each other and to be open to each other's views. Because only invitees were allowed to attend, the atmosphere encouraged people to open up, and the participants felt free to express their opinions and talk matters through together. During these meetings, the participants were able to take small steps of rapprochement with each other. However, there were also moments when people stopped listening, and contradicted and argued with each other. In many cases, these disagreements were caused by differences of opinion about the facts, the available knowledge, or the effectiveness of measures.

The two national dialogues clearly had a different character. The participants were representatives of national organisations and mainly expressed their professional opinions and standpoints. This sometimes led to heightened emotions and tension between the parties. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult for the participants to empathise with each other's perspectives or connect with and recognise the various discourses. However, a foundation for continued talks and a willingness to look for solutions together did emerge during the course of these dialogues.

"I never realised that it was not just my life that was turned upside down, but his too."

"It's good for me to hear how afraid you actually are, because that fear is completely unfamiliar to me."

"If it takes so much work to maintain those fences, then we should really come and help you."

"I've heard a lot of stories, but this one really hit home. I wouldn't know what to do in that situation either."

"Can we meet again with this group?"

2.1.3. Wolves make an impression

The council noted that everyone agreed that wolves are beautiful animals and spoke of them with awe. 'Majestic', 'magnificent' and 'impressive' were often used descriptions. Anyone who has encountered a wolf is impressed. When they recount their experiences, people can remember many details, such as the weather, the time of day, their thoughts, and the associated physical and emotional reactions of that moment.

People often have mixed feelings: they are in awe of wolves as beautiful wild animals, but at the same time they worry about the safety of people and their animals. The suffering of livestock that have been attacked by wolves is felt deeply. The sight of dead sheep – or still living but severely wounded sheep – stays with people and evokes feelings of pain, sadness, anger, fear and helplessness.

2.1.4. Room for sharing experiences and expressing emotions

Participants were often relieved that there was room for them to share experiences and express emotions, and felt taken seriously in this. People have different feelings about wolves; from amazement, delight and joy, through neutrality and indifference, to fear, sadness, anger and despair. The emotional reactions do not only concern direct experiences with wolves. People also feel that their lives have changed since wolves have returned. They do not always feel heard, or they feel they are not being taken seriously by the authorities. The people affected often do not know where to turn with questions, or they feel they are being shunted from one department to another.

Livestock keepers often feel that their emotional stress and their concern for their animals is given too little attention following incidents where livestock have been attacked by a wolf. They are often only offered economic and technical help. The affected livestock keepers consequently feel left in the lurch and powerless.

People who welcome the return of wolves and are happy to coexist with them also experience similar feelings. They expect the authorities to help them to adapt to the presence of wolves.

Differences in opinions about wolves and how to respond to their presence in the Netherlands cause tensions in communities. People who are 'for' or 'against' feel they are being incriminated for their opinions. Livestock keepers who have successfully implemented preventive measures do not always feel supported and appreciated by their colleagues. Others, who have been unable to protect their animals in their particular situation, feel left in the lurch.

"I used to live in paradise, now I'm in hell."

"There is always stress and constant worry."

"It's a sad thing that the wolf has led to so much polarisation and bickering."

"I feel sad. I'm just a sheep farmer. It's hard to deal with this".

"I'm so happy the wolf is back."

"I think it's great that the wolf is back. The first thing I thought was... wow."

2.1.5. Need for knowledge and information

During the dialogues there was a frequent call for clear, accessible and unambiguous knowledge. The lack of this knowledge feeds the uncertainty. When a Council member mentioned that much is still unknown about coexistence with wolves in the Netherlands, this was met with relief, and people remarked that it was "nice that someone had finally said it". People feel that they are being provided with different and conflicting advice by the experts. In their perception, the theory behind wolf-proofing measures differs from what they experience in practice. Or they hear about experiences abroad, which they feel have little to do with their own situation. There is a wide variety of information sources. People trust in their own sources and are fundamentally suspicious of other people's. The Council notes that people are generally suspicious of information that is provided by public authorities. Scientific knowledge and information is also suspect. In the public's perception, it does not correspond to what they experience in practice. People want clear perspectives as to what they can do. They want answers to very concrete questions, like: What should I do if I meet a wolf? And they want to know what to do in various conceivable situations: a flock of sheep in the countryside, a walk with the dog, riding a horse, a child cycling to school, etc.

"Research reveals that (...). So it must be true."

"According to wolf experts..."

"Yes, but I've read very different things on Facebook."

"My neighbour knows someone in Germany who..."

"Someone in the village said that..."

"How can an X know that? They haven't experienced it themselves. That is not based on the Dutch situation."

2.1.6. *Four discourses*

An important outcome of the dialogues is the identification of four different discourses.

A discourse reveals how a particular group of people think and talk about a social issue in a deeper social context. The four discourses on the topic of the wolf reveal that arguments for and against the establishment of wolves stem from personal experiences, assumptions and values. The discourses attempt to do justice to the various experiences with wolves while allowing the individuals who share these experiences to remain anonymous. There is no right or wrong, and all discourses are equal. They are intended as a tool to reveal what various Dutch people think about coexisting with wolves and what interventions they think are required to do so³. Four storylines were formulated using the parameters of 'proximity' and 'safety' (see figure). The first parameter is determined by the extent to which wolves affect everyday life. The second is determined by the perception of being 'in control'.

The report on the social dialogues distinguishes four discourses:

- Welcome the wolf (far away/safe)
- Doubts about the wolf (far away/unsafe)
- Accept the wolf (nearby/safe)
- Reject the wolf (nearby/unsafe)

These discourses (see External Annex 1 for transcriptions) were shared with the organisations that participated in the national dialogue to inspire them to reflect together on the different perspectives that determine people's needs and so help give form to potential interventions and solutions. During the second national dialogue, additional attention was drawn to the perspective of livestock keepers who are economically dependent on their animals and suffer from attacks on them.

The main, overarching insights derived from the local and national dialogues were (see 4.3 'Publiquest report' for a more detailed explanation):

- Nobody wants polarisation
- The wolf inspires awe
- Doing nothing is not an option
- This requires a government vision

³ The discourses were not bound to fixed structures; people who live close to wolves may welcome them, just as people who live far from them may reject them. The tool is not meant to create 'false polarities', nor disprove or confirm clichés.



Caption: The four discourses in relation to perceived safety (horizontal axis) and perceived distance (vertical axis). Various storylines were formulated using the parameters of 'proximity' and 'safety'. (Source: Publiquest final report, see External Annex 1)

2.2. The broader context of the social dialogue

Besides the social dialogue, the Council consulted several other sources to form a picture of public opinion for this advisory report.

2.2.1. Public surveys

Several public surveys have been held over the years⁴ that have paid attention to the return of wolves to the Netherlands. Overall, it proves that there is relatively broad support for the return and permanent establishment of wolves in the Netherlands, but the extent of this support varies. Furthermore, a large proportion of Dutch people report they do not know much about wolves, or what to do if they meet a wolf.

⁴ Sources: see the list of sources consulted at the end of the report.

Overview of public surveys⁵

In 2023, in a public survey commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 42% of respondents responded positively to the question of whether the wolf belongs in the Netherlands (Min LNV - Motivaction). This was 52% in 2020 (Min LNV - Motivaction) and 31% in 2012 (Min LNV - Infomart).

The proportion of Dutch people who think the wolf does not belong in this country was 20% in 2020 and 35% in 2023. Of these, 42% reported in 2020 that the main reason for this was that "wolves kill sheep, goats, ponies and calves". This was 76% in 2023.

The percentage of Dutch people who continue to visit nature reserves where wolves occur was also examined. This was 59% in 2020 and 52% in 2023. The proportion of respondents who said they wanted to avoid these areas was 23% in 2020 and 27% in 2023.

In a survey by Eurogroup for Animals in 2023, 67% of Dutch people responded with 'disagree' or 'no opinion' to the statement that the presence of wolves and other large predators leads to a sense of unsafety (Eurogroup for Animals- Savanta). In this survey, less than half said they knew something about the status of large predators in Europe (48%), their behaviour (46%) and how to scare them off (48%). So, many Dutch people actually do not know much about wolves or what to do if they meet a wolf.

Two statements in the Council's *State of the Animal* (SVHD1 and SVHD2) public surveys of 2018 and 2022 were about wolves. In 2018, 13% disagreed with the statement that "We should not drive off the wolf, but protect ourselves and our animals from the wolf." This was 20% in 2022. The second statement was "Wolves should not be hindered in their natural behaviour, including hunting and feeding on sheep." The proportion of Dutch people who disagreed was 31% in 2018 and 40% in 2022.

⁵ The Council on Animal Affairs presents some of the results here to give an idea of the nature of these surveys. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis. Nor is it intended as a comparison between the surveys, and it makes no value judgment on the design and methodology of the surveys. The Council is aware of the potential influence of time and media coverage on the outcomes of the various surveys. Attitudes about wolves change over a larger time span before, during and after their establishment in an area.

2.2.2. *Media analyses*

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) conducted media analyses⁶ on two different occasions over the periods 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and 1 April 2022 to 31 January 2024. RVO identified two particularly noteworthy outcomes: support for the wolf is declining, and its protected status is a subject of debate.

Regarding the first outcome, RVO's media analysis describes that support for the wolf is declining and that the debate about the wolf has become polarised, such that a dialogue or discussion on the subject has become more difficult. The polarisation of the debate was also frequently mentioned in the social dialogue.

In addition to the RVO analysis, the Council on Animal Affairs also collated statements about wolves in other media, such as podcasts and documentaries. The resulting overall picture is: learning to coexist with wolves will take time. Short-term solutions appear unfeasible and it seems inevitable that even in the long term things will occasionally have to go wrong. This was also pointed out during the social dialogue sessions.

The additional media analysis also revealed a number of insights that were rarely mentioned (if at all) in the dialogue sessions:

- In places where people do not coexist directly with wolves, the wolf is seen as a desirable enhancement of nature. This is because 'city folk' experience nature primarily as a thing to visit and enjoy.
- The involvement of wildlife organisations in the prevention of attacks on livestock is seen as lacking compared to other countries, where organisations help with erecting fences, for example.

In connection with this, the Council notes that the media often reports that people say they are prepared to take the law into their own hands. This was also reported in the exploratory study mentioned earlier (De Bie, Bergers and Gilden, 2022). However, this is inconsistent with people's willingness to find solutions together that the Council observed during the dialogue sessions.

⁶ The Council notes that the media analyses serve only to indicate how the media writes about wolves. Media outlets do not provide an objective picture and can in fact be used to 'frame' certain opinions. The 'silent majority' does not always get attention in these media. Figures from the media analysis lack confidence intervals and it is unknown whether the analyses were corrected for framing. Wolves play a role in the 'culture wars', involving misinformation, distortion, manipulation, urban legends, denial of facts, etc. Various accusations may be deployed in relation to wolves to achieve unrelated goals. In the meantime, the interests of animals may suffer due to gesture politics.

2.2.3. Political environment

The second outcome of RVO's media analysis is that the political environment in which the dialogue on wolves takes place is subject to change.

The EU is clear on wolves: they determine their own habitat. This is enshrined in both the Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive. The message is: only under very special circumstances is an intervention permitted. In September 2023, the European Commission⁷ announced that it was considering the possibility of downgrading the wolf's protected status from 'strictly protected' to 'protected'. The reason is that wolf packs are thought to have become a danger to livestock, and potentially also humans, in some parts of Europe. This decision will be taken sometime in 2024.

The media analysis reveals there is also political attention for wolves in the Netherlands. For instance, coexistence with wolves was a major issue during the 2023 provincial elections, especially in the Eastern and Northern provinces, and 'the wolf' featured in a number of election manifestos during the 2023 parliamentary elections.

2.3. The animal perspective

The Council also wants to consider the return of wolves from the position of various animals. Several perspectives are conceivable here, such as that of wolves, that of other wildlife, and that of livestock. Section 2.5 broadens this perspective to include the human and ecosystem domains.

The Council has formulated six principles of 'humane animal husbandry' for livestock (RDA, 2021). These six principles are:

- 1) Recognition of the animal's intrinsic value and integrity
- 2) Good feeding
- 3) Good living environment
- 4) Good health
- 5) Natural behaviour
- 6) Positive mental state (good welfare)

⁷ See, among others, European Commission (2023, October 14). "COUNCIL DECISION on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union, in the forty second meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats". European Commission. Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0543&from=EN>; European Commission (2023, September 4). "Wolves in Europe: Commission urges local authorities to make full use of existing derogations and collects data for conservation status review". European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4330; European Commission (2023, December 23). "Commission proposes to change international status of wolves from 'strictly protected' to 'protected' based on new data on increased populations and impacts". European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6752

The first principle, recognition of the animal’s intrinsic value and integrity, is applicable to both livestock and wild animals. The welfare of both livestock and wild animals depends on the same factors. The other principles are more difficult to superimpose onto animals in the wild. Harvey, Beausoleil, Ramp and Mellor (2020) describe a method that applies guiding principles to assess the welfare of animals in the wild using similar factors as for livestock. Obviously, the outcomes differ in comparison with the situation for livestock. For example, hunger, disease, fear and suffering are all part of living in a natural environment. For wild animals, adaptability⁸ is an important factor: to what extent is an animal able to adapt to changing conditions (RDA, 2018)?

In the table below, wild wolves have been compared with livestock for each of the six guiding principles for humane animal husbandry. The right column contains a general elaboration that applies to all livestock species, while the column for wolves contains more detailed and specific information.

Principles (conditions)	Wolves	Livestock (different for each species)
1. Recognition of the animal’s intrinsic value and integrity	Applicable to both livestock and wild animals. The welfare of both livestock and wild animals depends on the same factors.	
2. Good feeding	Habitat with a varied supply of prey including roe deer, wild boar, red deer and other smaller animals (such as hare). In practice, wolves also attack farm animals in the absence of natural prey.	The provision of sufficient water and feed of good quality.
3. Good living environment	Suitable environment with adequate shelter, resting places, and food. For example, an area with sufficient forest cover (30-40%), interspersed with heathland, dunes and/or agricultural land. Few encounters with people and dogs.	A comfortable and safe environment (including protection from predators) with a healthy climate (temperature, fresh air, biorhythm).

⁸ Definition in the RDA’s conceptual framework: Adaptability is the ability of animals or populations to respond appropriately (physically or behaviourally) to changes in the environment (with minimal loss of animal welfare, including animal health).

4. Good health	Environment and conditions that promote good health and provide sufficient opportunities to respond to changing conditions. Absence of disease and functional limitations. Opportunities to maintain a good fitness level ⁹ .	Environment, conditions and husbandry that promotes good health and prevents pain and injury (including by other conspecifics).
5. Natural behaviour	Environment and conditions in which the animal has sufficient opportunities to exhibit natural behaviour.	Environment and conditions in which animals can exhibit essential natural behaviour and fulfil needs.
6. Positive mental state (follows from 2 to 4)	Natural conditions allowing the animal to respond to the changed social and physical environment and achieve a state that it experiences predominantly as positive in an environment with as little as possible externally induced stress ¹⁰ .	Environment and conditions allowing the animal to respond to the changed social and physical environment and achieve a state that it experiences predominantly as positive. Such a state will result if all the conditions above are met.

⁹ For example, as few encounters as possible with dogs (disease transmission) and traffic (collisions with vehicles).

¹⁰ This is mainly caused by the presence of feral dogs, poaching and hunting pressure (Prins & de Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2).

For wolves, a habitat should contain enough shelter and resting places such that an animal can retreat to a safe place to bear young. Forest cover need not be continuous. The area may also consist of a cluster of forested areas interspersed with heathland and agricultural land. However, wolves can also live in dune landscapes, among others. Juvenile wolves roam more widely and are less fussy about their habitat. Wolves and livestock meet in a shared space, and this creates several dilemmas. Wolves go in search of food and determine themselves where to do so. If there are not enough wild prey animals about, they may turn to livestock if these animals are available. They mainly attack sheep, and in very exceptional cases calves, small horses and ponies, or adult cattle and horses if they can manage them¹¹. In other words, if there is little wild prey available, the predation pressure on farm animals will increase. This clashes with the principles of 'good living environment' and 'good health' regarding the humane husbandry of these animals. Their welfare is violated when attacked by wolves, and this applies to both physical injuries and pain and stress. Protective measures can also affect the welfare of livestock, for example by limiting the time they spend outdoors. Livestock keepers are required¹² to provide a safe living environment for their animals and prevent them from suffering pain. Based on this requirement, they should implement protective and preventive measures, such as wolf-proofing in the form of fences, livestock guardian dogs, night pens, etc.

For wild prey animals, the starting point from an ecological perspective is that predation is part of a naturally functioning ecosystem¹³. Their safety and welfare is derived from the natural environment and determined by food and shelter, predation pressure, health and the opportunity to exhibit natural behaviour. Wolf-proofing measures may affect wild prey animals. The benefits for livestock must therefore be weighed against any potential disadvantages for wildlife.

2.4. Perspectives for coexistence with nature

The question of "(How) can we coexist with wolves in the Netherlands?" can be answered from different perspectives. These perspectives stem, among other things, from fundamental attitudes to nature.

¹¹ A sharp distinction should be made between 'sheep'/goats' on the one hand and large livestock on the other (Prins & de Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2).

¹² According to the Animal Keepers Decree (section 1.6).

¹³ Another way to approach this is to apply the concept of 'significant influence'. This is not an ecological starting point, but rather a perspective for action. In a large space, a manager or owner has no influence over wild animals, be they predators or prey. If a wolf pack lives together with prey animals in a too small and fenced-off area, this is cruel to both livestock and wild animals that are the wolves' prey.

Fundamental attitudes to nature

Fundamental attitudes are shaped by religion, culture, experiences and opinions, among others.

Four commonly cited fundamental attitudes to nature are:

- Humans as rulers of nature
- Humans as stewards of nature
- Humans as partners of nature
- Humans as participants, with a holistic connection to nature

These fundamental attitudes determine how people perceive their relationships with nature. More than one fundamental attitude can be held at once, and people can switch perspectives depending on the context. For instance, many people have a different attitude towards their garden than towards the wilderness.

Fundamental and moral questions involving these attitudes include:

- What is nature in the Netherlands?
- To what extent are we willing to adapt to coexist with wild animals?
- Is it acceptable to intervene in nature to protect livestock?
- To what extent can livestock keepers be asked to adapt?
- How far is the government willing to go in explaining – or enforcing – the required changes?

These questions can also be asked in regard to coexistence with wolves or with other protected wild species, such as beavers, wild boars, golden jackals and lynxes. The answers change over time due to the evolving insight into what nature is, and hence what significance returnees or newcomers to nature can have.

Four discourses were developed under the social dialogue (see section 2.1.5). These reveal that people have different perspectives towards wolves: welcoming, acceptance, doubt or rejection. These fit with one or more of the fundamental attitudes towards nature. In this advisory report, the Council roughly follows the perspectives revealed during the discourses and has defined the following three scenarios:

1. Welcome (wolves are welcome)
2. Accept/Doubt (wolves permitted to an extent)
3. Reject (no place for wolves in the Netherlands)

The Council thus chose to highlight two extremes, 'Welcome' and 'Reject', and to merge 'Accept' and 'Doubt' in a larger middle category. These scenarios can help to identify perspectives for action, assess the pros and cons of the various solutions, and determine the consequences of these. For illustrative purposes, Appendix 3 briefly elaborates on the fundamental attitudes, potential developments and desired outcomes for these three scenarios.

2.5. Three domains

In its advisory report *Weighing Wildlife Welfare* (2017), the Council on Animal Affairs developed an assessment framework for wildlife policy. This is an instrument for assessing and comparing the various values and interests. The framework distinguishes between three domains: animals, humans and ecosystems. Wildlife policy assessments must take all three domains into account. The differences between the scenarios in relation to these domains are outlined below.

Animals

An important starting point for the animals domain is the recognition of intrinsic value. The 'Welcome' scenario comes closest to this. 'Accept/Doubt' come some way towards it, while 'Reject' is furthest from recognising this value.

The 'Welcome' scenario requires investing in the quality of habitats (food/shelter) and interconnected nature reserves. The more room wolves are given, the more opportunities they will have to exhibit their natural behaviour and adapt to the natural conditions.

Measures for protecting livestock from wolves restrict the movement of wolves. Other species such as roe deer and red deer may also be inhibited by wolf protection measures. For example, fences can cause fragmentation of animal habitats or restrict access to these (depending on the height and type of fences used). Livestock guardian dogs may inhibit the natural behaviour of other livestock and wild animals.

The 'Accept/Doubt' scenario involves considering restrictive measures such as managing population numbers and/or encouraging wolves to establish in suitable areas and discouraging them from establishing in others. Such measures contradict the aim of promoting and maintaining natural populations and may affect the welfare of wolves. The 'Reject' scenario goes even further, with measures aimed at preventing wolves from entering the country by trapping and relocating and – in extreme cases – killing animals that enter. These measures affect the welfare of wolves to varying degrees (impacts on both individual wolves and on social behaviour between wolves). Depending on what measures are taken to prevent wolves at the border, these measures may also have consequences for other animals (particularly large mammals), such as habitat fragmentation.

In addition to natural causes, the welfare of wolves (see section 2.3) may also be threatened by interactions with humans, for example with traffic.

Attacks by wolves on livestock obviously create welfare problems for these animals. As long as all livestock are protected (or all wolves kept out), then attacks will only occur on unprotected animals. Much depends on the dynamic balance between wild prey, the number of wolf packs, and the spatial behaviour of solitary wolves. Predation pressure on livestock will continue to vary. Besides wolf-proofing measures such as fencing, it may also be possible to reduce the risks with other measures. An example is to change the size or composition of a herd, leading to behavioural adaptations (flight, defence) or increased herd resilience. Another alternative is to relocate livestock to safer regions.

Humans

The humans domain covers the legal frameworks, among other things. The Netherlands is party to several international agreements on the protection and restoration of nature and specific habitats, species, plants and animals, including wolves. In addition to the Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive (the wolf is a strictly protected species and must be allowed to reestablish with as little disturbance as possible), the Netherlands has also signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the CITES convention and other treaties. These agreements give rise to legal obligations to protect and enhance wolf populations and the habitat in which wolves live¹⁴. Wildlife must be disturbed as little as possible. The 'Welcome' scenario best reflects current Dutch and European laws and regulations on nature. The 'Accept/Doubt' scenario comes some way towards this, while 'Reject' is furthest from respecting these agreements. Changing the current laws and regulations will involve lengthy processes at the European and national level and require substantive justifications of the need to change the legislation and the ecological feasibility of this. This requires a high level of scientific authority and investment in knowledge about wolves in the Netherlands and Europe. Several neighbouring countries provide examples of how to respond to wolves (Welcome-Accept-Doubt-Reject) and establish an independent wolf knowledge centre. The cultural value of wolves under this domain has a long history based on fables, myths, fairy tales and other historical interpretations. Some of these portray wolves in a positive light, while others do not. As a result, the wolf may come to mean more than just the animal itself. 'The wolf' is sometimes used as a symbol to depict other social problems, such as immigration or the gap between urban and rural people. The current image of wolves and people's feelings may be affected by this symbolism. It is important to be aware of this in all scenarios (Welcome, Doubt/Accept and Reject).

The social and societal impact is also part of this domain. Coexisting with wolves will involve new opportunities to reconsider how we value nature and our relationship with wildlife, but will also require humans to adapt. The return of wolves leads to dilemmas, economic and other conflicts of interest, fear (real and perceived), and concerns about attacks on livestock. Differences may also arise in how the landscape is experienced, which wolves and wolf-proofing measures may or may not influence. Each scenario requires a different effort and made-to-measure solutions to protect livestock, both from livestock keepers and society in general.

Each of the scenarios requires adequate support and the provision of information¹⁵; for example about preventing damage, proven solutions, best practices, and appropriate human behaviour in relation to wolves. Much is still unknown about the social impact of

¹⁴ "To this end, a protection system was formulated in the Nature Protection Act (later in the Environment and Planning Act). This system includes a number of prohibitions that apply in respect of the wolf. It is prohibited to:
- intentionally kill, capture or disturb wild wolves in their natural range
- damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places
- possess wolves taken from the wild, be they dead or alive" (BIJ12, 2024d)

¹⁵ For example, the knowledge team mentions that the potential danger of wolves to humans is not based on very much factual evidence (Prins & De Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2).

the return of wolves¹⁶.

The public's opinion is relevant and must be taken into account. There is less public support for the extreme scenarios 'Welcome' and 'Reject' than for the middle category 'Accept/Doubt'. Coexisting with wolves requires acceptance of changes in the landscape, spatial planning and the experience of the countryside caused by measures such as fences and livestock guardian dogs¹⁷. Solidarity is also a social aspect of this issue: solidarity with wolves, but also with the livestock keepers who have to take the measures. At the international level, coexistence with wolves touches on the solidarity of rich countries in the global north with countries in the global south in terms of nature restoration and coexistence with wild animals (Trouwborst, 2024).

Ecosystems

The ecosystems domain includes the impact of wolves on the diversity of species of plants and animals in nature and the countryside. Little is yet known about this impact in the Netherlands, because wolves have not been here long enough, and the influence of human management measures dominates. There is knowledge from other European countries about the role of wolves in ecosystems (Prins & De Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2), but it is not clear if this knowledge will be applicable to the Netherlands¹⁸.

The experiences of other countries reveal that wolves play an important role by restoring food chains, especially in areas where natural predators were previously absent. They can help keep wild populations of prey animals healthy by killing weak or diseased individuals. They also provide valuable functions for other animals, including scavengers such as ravens and foxes, smaller predators and insects such as beetles. The cadavers of their prey contribute minerals to the soil cycle. Also, the presence of wolves can cause wild ungulates to change their behaviour (for example foraging). The resultant effects on species composition and vegetation structure can change the landscape and the functioning of ecosystems. Wolves can make such contributions to plant and animal diversity in the Netherlands in the 'Welcome' scenario, but not in the 'Reject' scenario. Wolf-proofing measures will potentially impede the distribution of other species and populations throughout the countryside. Depending on their height and type, fences can form barriers for various animals. The behaviour of animals may be influenced by livestock guardian dogs. These impacts on individuals and populations may in turn affect the functioning of the ecosystem as a whole, both positively and negatively.

¹⁶ The knowledge team's report (Prins & de Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2) mentions that wolves keep deer and wild boar away from roads (because wolves tend to use paths and roads for more speed), reducing the likelihood of wildlife collisions with serious injury. This unexpected insight, that the societal benefit of wolves may outweigh the agricultural damage, deserves attention.

¹⁷ The Knowledge Report (Prins & De Bie, 2024, see External Annex 2) suggests that damage should only be compensated if robust protection measures were in place.

¹⁸ According to the knowledge team, the Netherlands is characterised by an 'anthropogenic' landscape, unlike countries like Poland or the US. This is why wolves probably play a quite different role at the ecosystem level. (Kuijper, D. P. J., Diserens, T. A., Say-Sallaz, E., Kasper, K., Szafrńska, P. A., Szewczyk, M., Stępiak, K. M., & Churski, M. (2024). *Wolves recolonize novel ecosystems leading to novel interactions*. Journal of Applied Ecology, 00, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.14602>.)

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

Based on the collected information, insights and interviews, the Council on Animal Affairs draws the following conclusions:

- Doing nothing is not an option. Encounters with wolves are becoming less rare, and people are concerned about themselves, their children, their animals and their businesses. On the one side are the feelings of unsafety and the economic interests of livestock keepers, on the other is the importance of wolves for nature and biodiversity. Moreover, the wolf also has intrinsic value, it is a protected species and livestock keepers are required to protect their animals. These interests and values conflict.
- Coexisting with wolves in the Netherlands brings new dilemmas in terms of protecting livestock and giving space to wild animals. Society will have to learn how to deal with this. Coherent measures and plans are needed for both the short and long term.
- It is important to pay attention to the polarisation of the debate on wolves. People want to be able to speak in safety and not be pigeonholed (as for or against wolves). In addition, the issue calls for urgent political action: there is a need for clarity and perspectives for action. People want to know how to deal with wolves in the Netherlands.
- The plans and measures initiated to date have largely been instrumental and economic in nature. They mostly relate to knowledge, facts, the damage caused and the compensation for this. This does not do justice to the social and emotional dimension. The return of wolves evokes many different reactions; both from society in general and from organisations and individuals who may have to deal with wolves in their everyday lives. The experience of wolves ranges from delight, awe and joy, through hesitation and uncertainty, to anger, fear and disgust.
- In the community dialogue meetings, it became clear that people are afraid and concerned about their physical safety and mental health (state of mind). This does not only concern the fear of aggression or predatory behaviour by wolves, but there is also concern about the health and welfare of wolves themselves. There are also fears about social safety due to polarisation and an atmosphere of intimidation and aggression. During the community dialogue meetings, the participants agreed that no one wants polarisation. People want more information, clarity from the government, and recognition of their emotions and dilemmas.

- We still lack a lot of knowledge. Specifically regarding the Dutch situation, little is yet known about how people can coexist with wolves and the effect of wolves on wildlife. It is largely uncharted terrain that still has to be explored. Humans and wolves need to learn to understand each other. Among other things, practical knowledge is needed on how to deal with wolves in everyday life. This could help people to manage their fears. There is plenty of general information available about wolves. The Council notes that some of this knowledge is being called into question. Selective or biased use of knowledge can lead to polarisation and misunderstanding. Examples of this were experienced during the community dialogue meetings.
- Coexisting with wolves in the Netherlands will require people to adapt. Some of the adaptations will require an enormous effort by the affected people, but not everyone is willing to make this effort. Some livestock keepers cannot afford to adequately protect their animals, be it for practical or economic reasons. This leads to animals being brought inside, herd numbers being reduced, or even to farms shutting down. The Council advises giving due attention to this bottleneck.
- Attacks on livestock give rise to feelings of fear and cause conflicts in society. The prevention of wolf attacks is good for the welfare of livestock, contributes to helping wolves become more accepted, and reduces social conflicts.
- Coexistence with wolves in whatever form requires both immediate measures and long-term plans. This process requires knowledge development, international coordination, public education, maintenance and investment. But it also requires an open attitude, both towards animals and towards other people.

3.2. Recommendation

The Council on Animal Affairs recommends that the government draw up a **national implementation strategy for wolves and society** so that all stakeholders can get to work on concrete goals. The implementation strategy should recognise the intrinsic value of all animals as its starting point, be guided by existing laws and regulations, and should be in line with a broader vision of the future of nature and nature restoration in the Netherlands. The implementation strategy should include the following three elements:

1. Vision of available **space for wolves** in the Netherlands
2. Attention to the **social dimension**
3. A solid foundation of **information, knowledge and research**

These three elements are explained in more detail below. During the course of the advisory process, the Council developed a clear idea of the frameworks for a successful discussion of the future of wolves in the Netherlands, and what criteria are important for the assessment.

1. Vision of making space for wolves in the Netherlands

- The starting point for a national implementation strategy for coexistence between wolves and society is an overarching, national vision. Such a vision can provide coherence by ensuring adequate coordination and **direction**, and transcends the instrumental and individual provincial framework that characterises the current wolf strategy, while aligning with existing plans as much as possible. A national framework is needed because wolves' habitats are not demarcated by provincial boundaries and more room needs to be created for society's needs. Coordination, both between all Dutch authorities, and international coordination with neighbouring German and Belgian regions (among others), is important to ensure a sharp distinction is made between territorial wolves and individuals that have not yet settled.
- The Council advises the national and provincial governments to develop this long-term vision, which will also require translation into a dynamic wolf policy. Such a policy must provide for continuous evaluation and adjustment of the choices made. Furthermore, where necessary, the policy must include additional measures to bring about the necessary change.
- The vision will settle the question of which parts of Dutch space are primarily intended for wildlife and nature. It will also confront the inevitable choices required in situations where animal husbandry and wolves are not compatible. The vision will be reflected in the implementation strategy and include concrete instruments (for example escalation measures and instruments for dealing with problem wolves and problem areas) and set out what can reasonably be expected of livestock keepers.

2. Attention to the social dimension

- In the debate about coexistence with wolves, the social context is at least as important as (scientific) factual knowledge and expert opinions. The national implementation strategy for coexistence between wolves and society must always take into account the diversity of perceptions, dilemmas and emotions. Coexistence with wolves will require some people to make major changes that may interfere with their daily lives. There will always be some degree of fear of wolves. To create a basic sense of safety, the government can offer people perspectives for action in case of encounters with wolves (e.g. clear advice on how to behave, infographics and information boards).

- An important aspect of this is reducing the likelihood of wolf attacks on livestock and reducing human-wolf interactions. Immediate, generous and large-scale investment in the implementation of wolf-proofing measures is needed. In this regard, the Council recommends exploring opportunities for funding wolf-proofing measures with Common Agricultural Policy funds. Efforts to protect sheep and other livestock must be supported and strengthened, with attention and practical solutions for both professional and hobby livestock keepers. The Council believes that preventive measures should be made more obligatory, by coupling compensation in areas designated as wolf habitats to certain conditions and deployment of enforcement. Clear criteria and deadlines must be established and clearly communicated to livestock keepers.
- In light of the urgency to take action, the Council recommends establishing an active national 'wolf team' to which livestock keepers can turn with practical questions about wolf encounters and what measures to take.
- Protective measures for livestock may also be necessary outside high-risk areas, as the distribution of wolves is never static.
- The Council believes it is important for organisations with divergent interests to remain in dialogue with each other, and therefore advocates the continuation of the meetings between the organisations that participated in the national dialogue meetings. The participants themselves asked for this.

3. A solid foundation of information, knowledge and research

- Reliable information is crucial, and the government has a big responsibility here. So, the development of knowledge and the provision of information to the public must be part of the national implementation strategy for coexistence between wolves and society. Education must also play a part in this.
- The Council recommends establishing a wolf knowledge centre, a wolf hotline and a wolf information desk. The knowledge and expertise of the Council's knowledge team can be utilised by the knowledge centre.
- It is important that the legal obligations and the goals of international agreements on wolves (and their protection) are known by all levels of government. The Council considers this a responsibility of the national government.
- There is a need for guidelines for erecting, positioning and dimensions of effective wolf-proof fencing. This information is important to be able to further develop solutions that work, while also disrupting other species as little as possible. Facilitating practical cooperation between nature conservationists and livestock keepers can foster more mutual understanding.
- Much research is still needed. The Council strongly advocates deploying knowledge and insights from the social sciences and multidisciplinary research. The Council has included a list of possible research topics in Appendix 4.

Final remarks

These recommendations represent an overview of all possible solution pathways, not taking into account time, resource and cost limitations. The Council on Animal Affairs realises that trade-offs will have to be made in the sequence of the measures. In regard to this sequence, the Council recommends adopting an approach that is integrated with the policies for nature and the countryside. A timeline and associated milestones can help to outline the concrete perspectives for action.

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Appendix 1. The advisory process

In the period leading up to the questions put by the ministers (2019-2022), a working group of the Council on Animal Affairs was established (at the Council's own initiative) to consider the developments surrounding the return of wolves to the Netherlands¹⁹. This working group called for a social dialogue and a broad approach to the issue, whereby a number of interviews with foreign experts provided useful input. This working group consisted of members Prof. J.J.M. van Alphen, D. van Gennepe, Prof. J.A.P. Heesterbeek, G.C. Six, M. Slob (chair) and C.W. Ripmeester.

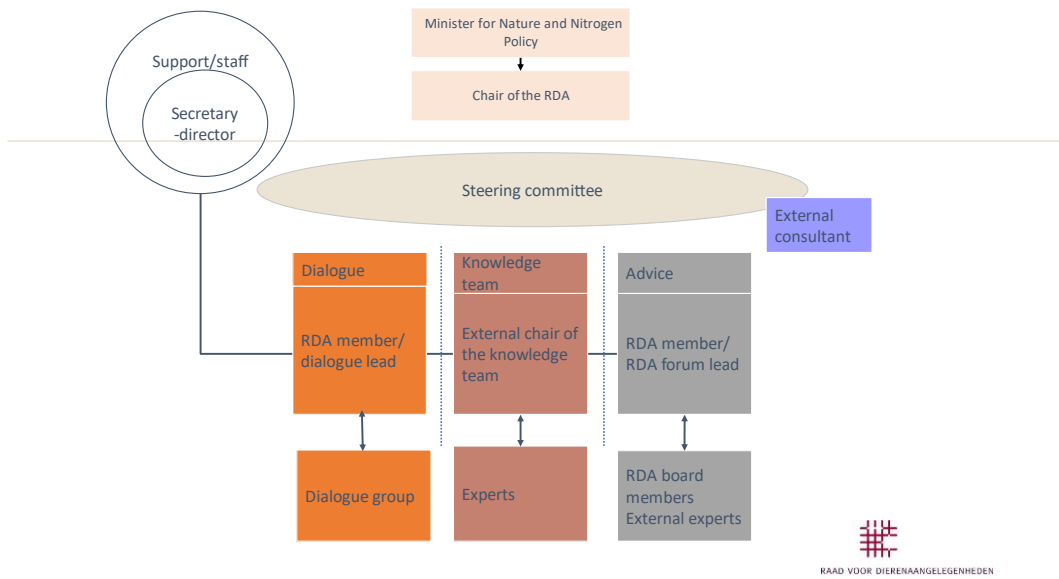
Following the ministers' request, the RDA staff office worked with Hiemstra & De Vries to design the process based on a three-track approach. This was in order to do justice to the distinction between the dialogue and the Council's advice, the complexity of the process and the required due diligence:

- Dialogue (conducted by Publiquest, supervised by RDA under Prof. G.M. van Dijk, RDA member)
- Advisory report (led by Prof. L.A. den Hartog, RDA member)
- Knowledge team (led by Prof. H.T. Prins, external expert)

The leads of each track also took part in an overarching steering committee, which also included RDA chair J. Staman, secretary-director M.H.W. Schakenraad and committee secretary R.L. van Oudheusden of the RDA team, and external consultant Ch. J. Kalden.

Publiquest supported the dialogue process. Prof S. de Bie provided support to the knowledge team. Each track resulted in an independent product.

¹⁹ *Initial document 'Positie van de wolf' | Publication | Council on Animal Affairs (rda.nl)*



Appendix 2. Policies of other European countries

Disclaimer: This translated Appendix is provided for informational purposes only. We cannot guarantee that the terminology and wording fully capture the original intent or context. For official interpretations, please refer to the original language version.

During the process of writing this advisory report, the Council on Animal Affairs also considered the legal status of wolves in other countries, and specifically the other European Member States, because these countries largely fall under the same European legislation as the Netherlands.

For instance, wolves are protected under the Habitats Directive, which are in turn an elaboration of the Bern Convention. Both treaties are concerned with the conservation of flora and fauna within Europe and both contain various appendices and annexes that describe the required degrees of protection.

Appendices of the Bern Convention and Habitats Directive

Appendices of the Bern Convention

- Appendix I: Strictly protected plant species
- Appendix II: Strictly protected animal species
- Appendix III: Protected animal species
- Appendix IV: Prohibited means and methods of hunting and other forms of exploitation

Annexes to the Habitats Directive

- Annex I: Natural habitat types of community interest whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation.
- Annex II: Animal and plant species of community interest whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation.
- Annex III: Criteria for selecting sites eligible for identification as sites of community interest and designation as special areas of conservation.
- Annex IV: Animal and plant species of community interest requiring strict protection.
- Annex V: Animal and plant species of community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures.
- Annex VI: Prohibited methods and means of capture and killing and modes of transport.

Many European Member States are subject to both Appendix 2 of the Bern Convention and Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive, and so both the wolves themselves *and* their habitats are strictly protected. Nevertheless, some countries also allow wolf culling, which is limited by so-called derogations (deviations from the normal regulations). Article 16 of the Habitats Directive provides for the possibility to derogate. However, a Member State must meet strict requirements to use the derogation.

Article 16 of the Habitats Directive

Article 16 of the Habitats Directive stipulates that Member States may derogate from the regulations if no other satisfactory solution exists and on the condition that the derogation may not lead to any adverse effect on efforts to maintain the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural distribution range. Valid reasons for a derogation include the prevention of serious damage, in particular to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water and other types of property, and the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature.

A pattern has emerged in the management of wolves under derogations. In countries that allow culling, this often concerns limited numbers of wolves per year, and these wolves may be shot anywhere except in designated protected areas. There are no areas designated as 'restricted for wolves', where wolves can be killed outright.

The map below shows that wolves are mostly seen as a strictly protected species.

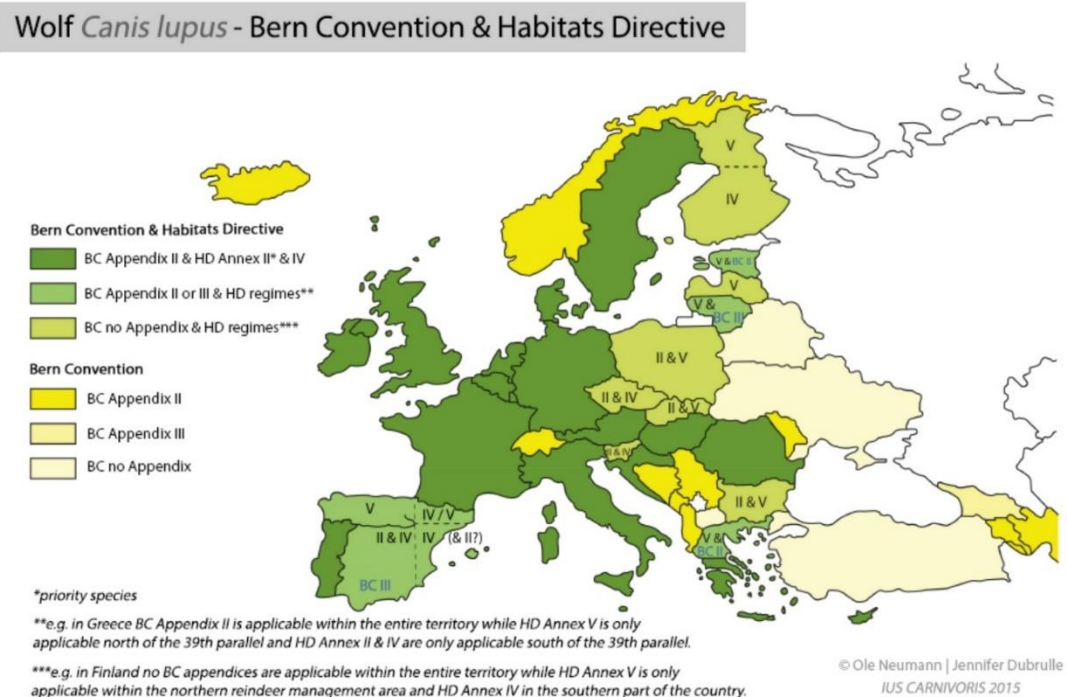


Figure 1: The legal status of wolves under the Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive (by Neumann & Dubrulle, *Ius Carnivoris* 2015). Available via license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Source consulted for this appendix Trouwborst, A., & Fleurke, F. M. (2019). *Killing wolves legally: Exploring the scope for lethal wolf management under European nature conservation law*. *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy*, 22(3), 231-273.

Appendix 3. Three scenarios for coexisting with wolves

The social dialogue resulted in four discourses, which reveal that people have different perspectives towards wolves: welcoming, acceptance, doubt or rejection. In this advisory report, the Council roughly follows the perspectives revealed during the discourses and has defined the following three scenarios:

1. Welcome (wolves are welcome)
2. Accept/Doubt (wolves permitted to an extent)
3. Reject (no place for wolves in the Netherlands)

For illustrative purposes, the fundamental attitudes, potential developments and desired outcomes of these three scenarios are elaborated in more detail here.

1: Wolves are welcome (Welcome scenario)

"Welcome to the Netherlands, wolves. Our apologies for what happened 150 years ago. We now offer you all the space you need and will help you where we can to establish and optimise your habitat. You decide which areas are suitable for you to settle in. Only if you cause insurmountable problems will we actively intervene, but that will happen extremely rarely. We will try to adapt as much as possible to your establishment here."

Potential developments

The best locations are populated first. With seven packs, the Veluwe region already appears to have almost reached peak occupation. This is followed by slightly poorer regions, such as Drenthe, Twente, Achterhoek, heavily wooded parts of North Brabant, and the border regions may follow as territories without international boundaries. Where possible, measures can be taken to optimise or connect habitats. At some point, all suitable territories will be occupied and no new territories will be added. Preventing damage will be the cornerstone of a policy to prevent animal suffering as much as possible.

The desired stable outcome

Wolves themselves determine their numbers and where in the Netherlands they establish. All livestock keepers take all possible measures to protect their animals. Damage is only fully compensated if the measures were properly implemented. Some livestock keepers will cease their operations because they are unwilling or unable to take the required preventive measures.

Keywords, visions and attitudes towards nature that fit this mindset are: vision of nature as a wilderness, arcadian vision of nature, ecocentrism, zoocentrism.

2: Wolves permitted to an extent (Accept/Doubt scenario)

"So you're back? A lot has changed during your absence. You can no longer settle anywhere you want; we decide where you can and cannot live. We will do this by designating areas that we think are suitable for you and chasing you from all other areas. Or we will set a limit on the number of wolves that can live here."

Potential developments

Criteria will be drawn up for identifying suitable areas. Relevant criteria could be a sufficiently varied supply of wild prey, or the number of animals already settled in the area. Another option is to wait until wolves have settled and then determine whether the area is suitable.

Wolves are actively removed from unsuitable areas. Roaming wolves are not disturbed in principle, unless they stay too long in an unsuitable area.

To set limits on numbers of wolves, the basis for determining their numbers must first be agreed. Wolves will be actively driven away or removed to enforce the agreed maximum. Established packs in suitable areas for wolves will not be disturbed.

Wolves can be actively removed in several ways: driving them off, capturing and relocating them, or killing them.

Choices for active culling could include: cull the entire pack (criterion: packs that cause the most nuisance are culled first); and/or cull (some of) the young from a pack.

In all cases involving areas with established wolves and corridors that are regularly used by solitary wolves, preventing damage will be the cornerstone of a policy to prevent animal suffering as much as possible.

The desired stable outcome

People determine in which areas wolves can or cannot live and/or in what numbers. This is inconsistent with the current protection status of the wolf. Active management measures are taken to limit wolves to designated areas and maximum numbers of animals. There where wolves are tolerated, there is maximum commitment to implement protective measures for livestock. Damage is only fully compensated if the measures were properly implemented by the livestock keeper. Keywords, visions and attitudes towards nature that fit this mindset are: arcadian vision of nature, anthropocentrism, zoocentrism.

3: No place for wolves in the Netherlands (Reject scenario)

"There is no place for you here, wolves. We drove you off for a reason. We have a zero-tolerance policy for the whole country. Any wolf that crosses the border will be shot or driven back. Dutch people and livestock keepers should not have to adapt to wolves."

Potential developments

Methods should be developed to actively prevent wolves from crossing the border. Existing wolf packs and solitary wolves must go. This means driving them off, capturing and relocating them across the border, or killing them. This scenario will require legislation to be changed.

The desired stable outcome

No more wolves enter the Netherlands. This is inconsistent with the current protection status of the wolf. Livestock keepers can let their animals roam freely outdoors as they used to and do not have to take far-reaching measures. Any stray wolves will be immediately removed. Any damage to livestock will be fully compensated. Keywords, visions and attitudes towards nature that fit this mindset are: functional vision of nature, anthropocentrism.

Appendix 4. Possible research topics

- Fear perception and risk perception in relation to coexistence with wild animals and nature.
- Scenarios for coexisting with wolves.
- Measures for optimising wolf habitats (food/shelter/traffic measures) and the added value of connecting nature reserves in the wider context of nature restoration.
- The behaviour (including spatial behaviour) of wolves in the Netherlands, both territorial and juvenile (solitary) animals.
- Effects of wolves on Dutch landscapes and local plant and animal diversity.
- Options and criteria for non-lethal methods, appropriate to natural wolf behaviour and fitting within legal frameworks, to discourage wolves from settling in certain areas.
- Options and criteria for how humans can influence wolves, so that wolves can learn what desirable and undesirable behaviour is and maintain a certain wariness towards humans. Consider examples from abroad for dealing with bears (*'three strikes out'*).

Composition of the Council

The Council on Animal Affairs (RDA) is an independent council of experts that provides solicited and unsolicited advice on multidisciplinary issues in the field of animal welfare, including animal health and ethical issues, to the ministers responsible for the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

The RDA comprises approximately forty members with very different backgrounds and expertise, whose membership is in a personal capacity and not bound by any instructions or binding mandate. The draft advisory report was submitted to the entire Council for assessment. As such, the report is a product of the Council as a whole.

Suggestions for citations: Council on Animal Affairs (2024). Coexisting with wolves in the Netherlands. The Hague, the Netherlands. 41 pages.

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The Hague, May 2024

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