

The EU Platform on Large Carnivores - state of play and next steps

DG ENV launched the EU Large Carnivore Initiative for the conservation and sustainable management of large carnivore species¹ in 2012, partly drawing on lessons from the substantial experience under the LIFE programme on coexistence issues with large carnivores².

One of the aims of the initiative is to facilitate a constructive dialogue among relevant stakeholders on ways of achieving successful coexistence between humans and large carnivores in the EU.

The earlier agreement between FACE and BIRDLIFE in 2004 on sustainable hunting under the Birds Directive was an inspiration for this goal. However, the situation is more complex for the large carnivores since more categories of different stakeholders are involved. DG ENV's first aim was to reach an agreement to be signed by the major stakeholder organizations who thereby commit themselves to a structured debate to find commonly agreed solutions to human – large carnivore conflicts, with a view to the long-term conservation and sustainable management of large carnivore species.

A series of consultative meetings with the main European stakeholder organizations has been organized by DG ENV to discuss the possibilities of setting up the initiative. The purpose was to ensure their early buy-in to a possible agreement setting out the main principles for a structure to support the constructive dialogue. This group consists of representatives of the main European umbrella organizations; farmers, landowners, hunters, conservation NGOs, and also reindeer-herders (who do not have European representation). There have also been two broader consultative workshops with larger audiences of stakeholders from across the EU, of nearly one hundred participants each time (held on 25 January and 5 December, 2013)³.

These discussions have been very difficult, especially in the beginning, when some of the stakeholders had reservations not only about the views of the other stakeholder groups, but also about the Commission's intentions. However, this mistrust has relaxed considerably and a general support has emerged through these meetings and workshops for a structured dialogue aimed at finding solutions to human – large carnivore conflicts.

The above discussions have led DG ENV to propose that the **EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores** be set up. It would facilitate an exchange of views

¹ The species of concern are the Brown Bear, the Wolf, the Eurasian Lynx and the Wolverine. The highly threatened Iberian Lynx is not part of this exercise.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/documents/carnivores.pdf>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/promoting_dialogue.htm

and experiences among different stakeholders, and to find commonly agreed solutions to conflicts. Established good practices can also be brought to the attention of others and the transfer of knowledge and expertise can be encouraged and facilitated through this dialogue.

We have secured the buy-in of the major stakeholder organizations with whom we have agreed on a draft agreement setting out key principles to which they would sign up to in order to join the Platform (see Annex).

In order to make the EU Platform functional, only umbrella organizations with European representations have been invited to join the Platform (with the exception of the reindeer-herders). The involvement of other bodies, including national/ local organizations linked to these major stakeholders could be brought to the debate through the umbrella organizations, or through regional sub-platforms which may be established in the future, at the initiative of the Platform members themselves.

Launch of the Platform

The launch of the Platform is scheduled for the *10th of June, 2014*. During the first, ceremonial session, the agreement to join the platform will be signed by high-level representatives of the stakeholder organizations in the presence of Commissioner Janez Potočnik. This will then be followed by the first working session of the Platform when the terms of reference and a work plan for the future activities the Platform will be discussed.

The work of the Platform will consist of annual meetings and thematic or regional workshops depending on the members' interest and willingness to contribute. A website will be set up to act as a resource centre on human – large carnivore coexistence issues and means of dissemination of information on the activities of the Platform.

The Platform could also facilitate voluntary participation of its members in implementing certain key actions identified at the population level for LC species (see *Doc. Hab 14-04/03.b*).

DG ENV will provide logistical and technical support to the Platform, at least during the first two years of its activities.

DG ENV will continue to regularly update Member States on progress on the EU Large Carnivore Initiative through various fora, such as the Habitats Committee, the CGBN and the EU Nature Directors' Meeting.

Member States are invited to follow the work of the Platform and to cooperate with its members in their endeavours.

ANNEX

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Agreement to participate in the EU Platform *on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores*

In recognition of the challenges arising from the conservation of large carnivores in the European Union, the European Commission has established a Large Carnivore Initiative. Following discussions with stakeholders, it has been decided to establish a dedicated EU Platform on Large Carnivores in order to provide a framework for structured dialogue among stakeholders on the issues arising from co-existence of people and large carnivore⁴. This will be a voluntary grouping of main stakeholder organizations with an interest in large carnivore issues.

The mission of the platform is to

PROMOTE WAYS AND MEANS TO MINIMIZE, AND WHEREVER POSSIBLE FIND SOLUTIONS TO, CONFLICTS BETWEEN HUMAN INTERESTS AND THE PRESENCE OF LARGE CARNIVORE SPECIES, BY EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE AND BY WORKING TOGETHER IN AN OPEN-ENDED, CONSTRUCTIVE AND MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL WAY.

The organizations listed below agree to the following core principles:

1. Working within the EU legal framework

The EU's Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) is the overarching legal instrument for the conservation and sustainable management of Large Carnivore species at a favourable conservation status in the EU.

2. Ensuring the necessary knowledge base

Any management of large carnivores must be determined on the basis of sound scientific evidence using best available and reliable data.

3. Recognition of socio-economic and cultural considerations and concerns

Human societies have the right to use their natural resources and preserve cultural heritage in a sustainable way within multifunctional landscapes, of which large carnivores are an integral part. The contribution of economic activities to the values of those landscapes has to be recognised. The need to ensure public safety should also be recognised.

⁴ The species of concern are the brown bear, the wolf, the Eurasian lynx and the wolverine: the highly endangered Iberian lynx is not part of this initiative.

4. Solutions to conflicts through constructive dialogue among stakeholders

Finding solutions arising from conflicts with large carnivores and facilitating human-large carnivore coexistence is best achieved through constructive dialogue among key stakeholders at local, national and EU levels. These solutions should be adapted to local and regional conditions.

5. Engagement in trans-boundary cooperation

The vast majority of the populations of large carnivore species in the EU have ranges that cross national borders. Therefore national solutions will not work in isolation without meaningful stakeholder dialogue involving trans-boundary cooperation within the EU, and where appropriate, with neighbouring countries, taking into account, inter alia, the Guidelines for Population Level Management Plans for Large Carnivores.

The undersigning organizations commit themselves to the EU Platform on Large Carnivores. By doing so, they undertake to work together to find solutions to conflicts arising from the coexistence of humans and large carnivores by

- sharing their experiences and expertise in addressing the challenges of human and large-carnivore coexistence;
- listening to, and discussing other stakeholders' experiences and views;
- engaging in dialogue for consensus seeking and accepting that solutions may at times involve compromise;
- being open to accept examples of good practices for successful coexistence of humans and large carnivores;
- expressing willingness to transfer and test those examples of good practices;
- ensuring their capacity to fully engage in the work of the platform.

Signed
Organization1
Etc.

Signed
Organization2