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**Standing Committee**

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**Bureau of the Standing Committee**

10-12 September 2024  
Strasbourg

**Possible File: 2022/03**

**Wolf Culling Policy in Norway  
(Norway)**

- GOVERNMENT REPORT -

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ROYAL NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF  
CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

## **Progress report: Complaint No. 2022/03 Wolf Culling Policy in Norway**

### **General remarks**

We refer to your letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> April, where Norwegian authorities are invited to send a progress report regarding Complaint No. 2022/03. Since the Government's report in February, there have been no significant changes to report regarding the national policy or the management of wolves in Norway in general. However, we would like to give an update regarding measures to protect a new immigrant from the eastern wolf population in Finland/Russia. We also take note of the decision of the Bureau to elevate the status of the complaint to a possible file and we wish to comment the findings and recommendations of the Bureau.

The Bureau finds the decrease of the Norwegian part of the Norwegian-Swedish wolf population over the last five years to be worrisome. We want to stress that the management of the Norwegian part of the wolf population is based on the absolute requirement that the survival of the Norwegian-Swedish wolf population is not jeopardised. The management system is constructed to safeguard that the survival of the population is not put at risk, while allowing the population to be managed. A comprehensive monitoring programme provides the authorities with very detailed and up to date knowledge on the state of the wolf population. Furthermore, improving the genetic situation is a top priority, and great emphasis is put on protecting individuals immigrating from the population in Finland/Russia. We refer to Government report 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022 for a more elaborate account of our position.

The Bureau encourages Norwegian authorities to reconsider the approach of pre-emptive culling, and instead apply proven prevention methods and to raise awareness of the role of the wolf in nature and social acceptance of the species. In accordance with the Convention, wolf culling will only be allowed if there are no other satisfactory way to prevent damage to livestock or to safeguard overriding public interests. Separating wolf territories and livestock areas, by designating a zone where wolves are prioritized over other interests, is a main prevention measure. Also, grants are provided for more specific prevention and conflict-reducing measures. These are methods directly preventing damage to livestock from large carnivores, i.e., fencing, adjusting the time livestock is on grazing land, removing herds to areas less prone to attacks from large carnivores, keeping alternative grazing land on standby, more extensive supervision with herds, and measures increasing knowledge about the effectiveness of such prevention methods. Grants are also provided for measures aiming at reducing conflicts, through increasing knowledge and understanding for wolves and the management of wolves. The annual budget for prevention and conflict-reducing measures is above 6 000 000 EUR. Four Visitor Centres have been established, providing the public with information on large carnivores, their role in the ecosystem and on the management of these species. One of the offers provided by the Visitor Centres is a free educational program for schools, where nature guides are available for school visits or classes may visit the Centres.

Nevertheless, due to the political intention to maintain open field grazing in large parts of Norway, there may be a potential for damage on livestock in these areas that cannot be prevented in any other satisfactory way than by regulating the size of the wolf population. Norwegian authorities have also

allowed the population of wolf packs in the management zone for wolves to be regulated. In this area open field grazing is very limited. However, for a period of time there has been considerable conflict in the society relating to the Norwegian part of the wolf population exceeding the population target. The population target has been set by the Norwegian Parliament as a compromise, to achieve the objectives of both maintaining a wolf population and safeguarding other important societal interests. The Ministry's assessment has been that overriding public interests, with an emphasis on regional policy and reducing the conflict in the society, could not be achieved in any other satisfactory way than by permitting culling inside the management zone, to bring the size of the population closer to the population target. The Norwegian Supreme Court has confirmed that the assessments of the authorities in two cases regarding wolf culling, both outside and inside the management zone, have been lawful.

The Bureau suggests that Norwegian authorities partake in international exchanges on best practice in management of large carnivores. We are very much open to participating in such exchange, and we have a comprehensive cooperation with our neighbours in Finland and Sweden. This cooperation is formalised in a framework document, which includes text as follows:

*Facilitating transboundary implementation of unique management strategies and tools.*

Each of the Fennoscandian countries have developed unique strategies and tools to manage their respective wolf populations. These include e.g., courses in depredation identification and prevention, training and use of dogs to identify carnivore species responsible for livestock attacks based on cadavers, intervention protocols for dealing with bold wolves, web applications to involve the public in monitoring, and models to estimate the magnitude of poaching, estimate population sizes, and predict future spatial distributions of wolves. In order to effectively share each country's unique competences and management tools, the respective authorities will work to communicate the effectiveness of various strategies, and to facilitate the implementation of these strategies and tools in the other countries when needs are identified.

Furthermore, Norwegian authorities have contributed to setting up, provided financial support to and participated at the Wolves Across Borders conference held in Stockholm, Sweden in 2023 ([Conference | Wolves Across Borders](#)).

## **Information on the state of the wolf population**

### Status

The Norwegian-Swedish wolf population is determined every winter season (1<sup>st</sup> October – 31<sup>st</sup> March), mainly through snow-tracking and collection of DNA material. The population was estimated to 440 wolves in winter 2023-2024. A total of 58-60 wolves were counted in Norway including half of the cross-boundary wolves, and 42-44 wolves were confirmed living only in Norway. These numbers include all wolves, and a total of 67 wolves (20 wolves in Norway) were recorded dead in Scandinavia during the monitoring season.

The Norwegian Parliament has decided a population target of 4-6 reproductions of wolves each year, whereof three reproductions must be in wolf-territories entirely in Norway. Last monitoring season 46 family groups were documented in Scandinavia, including five entirely within Norway and three across the Norwegian-Swedish border. In addition, a total of 30 territorial wolf-pairs were documented, including one within Norway and three across the border. When counting half the cross-border wolves, 6,5 family groups were registered in Norway, which is just above the population target. These numbers include all wolves, and one of the Norwegian family groups and two of the cross-border family groups were recorded dead during the period.

### Genetics

The genetic situation is considered critical for the Norwegian-Swedish wolf population, due to low numbers of founder individuals and inbreeding. Through DNA analysis, the development is monitored each year, and the estimated average inbreeding coefficient was found to be 0.23. This corresponds to sibling-reproductions. To prevent further negative development of the inbreeding situation, at least one

new immigrant must reproduce in Scandinavia every five years/wolf-generation.

To improve the situation, Norwegian and Swedish authorities take actions to protect immigrants from the larger eastern wolf-population in Finland/Russia. In 2019 a wolf from the Finnish-Russian population wandered into Norway. The individual was relocated from areas with high potential of damage on semi-domestic reindeer and sheep to the management zone for wolves. The individual established in this area and has produced litters every year since 2021. During winter 2023-2024, a new immigrant from the Finnish-Russian population was detected in Norway through DNA. In April, the immigrant was relocated to the management zone for wolves. A GPS collar has been attached to the immigrant to keep track of its location, and culling has been paused in areas in which the individual has moved.

#### Development of the population

In general, the Norwegian-Swedish wolf population has been in growth since the 1990s, but there has been a recorded reduction of the total population for the last two years (figure 1). In Norway the population is now reduced according to the population target set by the Norwegian parliament, after some years with a population above this level (figure 1).

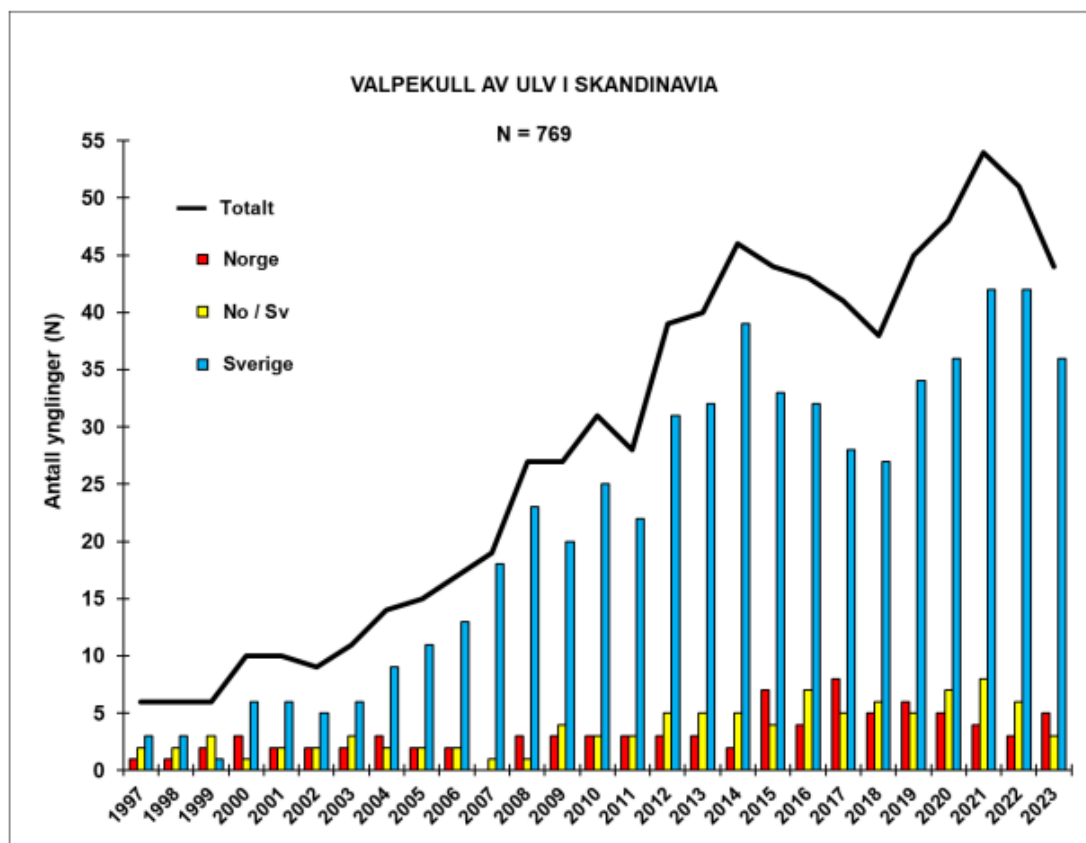


Figure 1. Reproductions of wolves in Norway (red), across the border of Sweden and Norway (yellow) and Sweden (blue) in the period 1997-2023. The black line indicates the total number of reproductions in Scandinavia. Source: (Wabakken, P., Swensson, L., Maartmann, E., Nordli, K., Flagstad, Ø., Danielsson, A., Cardoso Palacios, C & Åkesson, M. 2024. Bestandsovervåking av ulv vinteren 2023-2024. Inventering av varg vinteren 2023-2024. Bestandsstatus for store rovdjur I Skandinavia. Bestandsstatus for stora rovdjur I Skandinavien 1-2024. 61 s.).

### **Cooperation with Swedish authorities**

There is well-established and long-lasting cooperation between the Norwegian Environment Agency and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency on carnivore management. The Agencies have developed shared strategies for management of the wolf population since the 1990s. The current MOU between the authorities in both countries state that:

- Carnivore management in each country is defined by national regulation and national politics.
- Carnivore monitoring should be conducted on a population level.
- Carnivore populations in Sweden and Norway are transboundary.
- Monitoring of those populations will best be served by standardized methods used similarly and simultaneously in both countries.
- Results of monitoring efforts, as defined by regulations and budgets in each country, should be reported at the population level, thereby requiring joint databases and coordinated public access to data and reports.
- The added value of cooperation and reciprocal information with regard to the conservation and management of carnivores is beneficial to both parties.

The Agencies hold annual meetings to inform and discuss management and policy implications. The collaboration also involves investigating the need for scientific knowledge and obtaining such for both countries. These meetings also include Finnish authorities, represented by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

The Norwegian management zone for wolves is located towards the Swedish border, allowing for wolf territories that are shared between Norway and Sweden. If culling is considered in a shared wolf territory, Norwegian regulations state that Norwegian authorities are obliged to contact Swedish authorities with an intention to reach an agreement on the matter. For some years, Norwegian authorities have allowed culling in the Norwegian part of shared wolf territories. Before these decisions were made, there was contact between the relevant regional boards for carnivore management in Norway and the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment, and relevant Swedish authorities.

Furthermore, shared guidelines are established for Norwegian and Swedish authorities regarding management of genetically important individuals. Basic elements of these guidelines are information-sharing and contact between Norwegian and Swedish authorities in situations involving such individuals. For instance, the Norwegian Environment Agency shares information about the immigrant from the Finnish-Russian population that was collared and relocated in April with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, as the individual has later crossed the border to Sweden.