

**Question for written answer E-000550/2013
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Riikka Manner (ALDE)

Subject: Interpretation of the Habitats Directive in relation to wolves

Hunting of wolves (*Canis lupus*) is regulated throughout the EU by the Habitats Directive. An annex to the Directive defines the wolf as a species in need of strict protection. An exception is made in Finland for the reindeer conservation area, where wolves may in principle be hunted, but only with a permit. Provided that exceptional permits are issued, wolves may also be hunted elsewhere in Finland in order to prevent particularly serious damage.

Wolf populations in Finland are considered to be small, and conservation measures can be regarded as justified within certain limits. However, in Finland situations constantly arise in which, for example, wolves become a threat to the safety of children travelling to and from school. Measures to maintain safety then occasion extra costs both to children's parents and to the localities where they live. The human input which is required probably cannot even be measured and described. In addition, at times wolves cause irreparable harm to farm animals and animals used for recreation, even outside the reindeer conservation area. Numbers of sightings of large predators have increased in Finland as a whole, suggesting that, for natural reasons, large predators are choosing to live closer to human beings than previously and, for instance, that wolves are less afraid of people than they used to be. Significantly more damage has been caused by large predators in recent years. In Northern Savo province alone, which is not one of the main wolf habitats in Finland, 22 344 cases of damage caused by wolves were registered in 2008–2011. Much of the damage involves injury to dogs or other pets. Wolves are the only large predator that also frightens people moving around in the forests for purposes of their work. It is hoped that the number of hunting permits will be increased and that discretionary powers will be devolved to a more local level than at present. As things stand, there is a feeling that decisions on conservation measures and on permits mainly express the wishes of sections of the population who do not themselves live in areas where large predators are concentrated. If forestry experts were to eliminate problematic individuals, this would also serve to maintain the animals' natural fear of human beings.

Has the Commission considered the possibility that the whole of Finland could be classified in the same way as the reindeer conservation area from the point of view of wolf-hunting (i.e. that it could be transferred from Annex IV to Annex V of the Habitats Directive)? Secondly, has the Commission assessed adverse effects of the Habitats Directive on people, such as indisputably arise in the situations described here for wolves?