URGENT - Stop the Swedish licensed hunt on protected endangered wolves

Dear Commissioner Vella,

Based on clear provisions in the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC), the European Commission has repeatedly and formally criticised Sweden for its large-scale licensed hunt of the endangered wolf (infringement case 2010/4200). On the same grounds, national administrative courts have repeatedly issued injunctions or annulled the Swedish EPA’s illegal wolf-hunting decisions, based on appeals from the Swedish national member of the EEB (the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) and WWF Sweden.

Despite this, the Swedish government and EPA have opened a new large-scale licensed hunt, which is scheduled to start tomorrow, 9 January 2015. As you know, the government has also changed the hunting regulation to deny environmental organisations access to justice. Decisions on the licensed wolf hunt have been delegated to county administrations and appeals are to be made instead to the EPA, thereby entirely circumventing national courts (which is the reason for infringement case 2014/2178).

Last autumn, the former Minister of Agriculture made it clear in an editorial piece that these changes were aimed at avoiding judicial review and preventing courts from applying EU law in the case of licensed wolf hunting (please see the Minister’s article “EU must not decide on the wolf” at https://db.tt/6DdgL57K).

Consequently, three county administrations used their delegated right on licensed wolf hunting and decided to cull 44 wolves, starting this week. This amounts to 10-13 percent of the entire population. It rests on a scientifically flawed Parliamentary decision from 2013 that stated that the wolf population has reached a Favourable Conservation Status, and that 170-270 wolves in the country will suffice to maintain that status. Earlier assessments made by the EPA, official public inquiries and international scientific panels have pointed out that much higher figures would be required. The scientific community has therefore repeatedly criticised the decision for not being based on scientific reasoning or on EU law.
Our national members have appealed the county decisions. Two of these were rejected by the EPA this week; the third one is still pending.

**Sweden is clearly failing to comply with EU law and the Government is directly and deliberately disregarding the repeated criticism from the Commission on this matter.**

At the recent EEB Conference we welcomed your statement that you “will not hesitate to resort to all the means at your disposal to penalise those who intentionally fail to live up to their obligations.” The Swedish Government’s persistent attempt to carry out an illegal, large-scale licensed hunt on endangered and protected wolves is a clear case of non-compliance in this respect.

We therefore urge you to rapidly take Sweden to the European Court of Justice in the first infringement case, and to issue a motivated opinion in the second case. Moreover, under the principle of cross-compliance, we would urge you to consider withholding European Funds received by Sweden until their actions are brought in line with the EU legislation. In addition, considering the urgency of the matter, an immediate public statement from the Commission will be required as an important signal to the Swedish Government to reconsider and annul its decisions on a massive hunt on a seriously endangered mammal in Europe.

In view of the importance and urgency of this issue, we are sending this letter also to the Commission First Vice President, Frans Timmermans.

Yours sincerely,

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Jeremy Wates
Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau

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Tony Long, WWF
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Cc : Karl Falkenberg, Director General

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