

Intergroup  
SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES  
Intergroupe  
CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES  
Intergruppe  
NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN  
Intergruppo  
CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI  
Intergrupo  
CAZA SOSTENIBLE, BIODIVERSIDAD & ACTIVIDADES RURALES

**Meeting 22.05.2008**  
**Challenges of hunting in Nordic countries**

**MEPs**

ATTARD-MONTALTO, John (PSE, Mt)  
EBNER, Michl (EPP-ED, It)  
GOUDIN, Hélène (IND/DEM, Sw)

MATHIEU, Veronique (EPP-ED, Fr)  
SCHIERHUBER, Agnes (EPP-ED, At)

*Apologised*

DESS, Albert (EPP-ED, De)  
LEHTINEN, Lasse (EPP-ED, Fi)  
LULLING, Astrid (EPP-ED, Lux)

SEPPÄNEN, Esko (GUE, Fi)  
STURDY, Robert (EPP-ED, UK)  
WESTLUND, Asa (PSE, Sw)

**Experts / Observers**

HILDENBRANDT, Herbert (EPP-ED)  
KONTRO, Lauri (Finish Hunters' Ass.)  
MACHIODI, Giorgio  
MOLAND, Torstein (Norwegian Hunters' Ass.)

MÖRNER, Torsten (Swedish Hunters' Ass.)  
de TURCKHEIM, Gilbert (FACE President)  
WARASIN, Markus (CLIM, DG IPO)  
WARASIN, Margit

**Assistants**

BAYMATOVA, Malika (J. ATTARD-MONT.)  
FORSTNER, Dietmar (A. SCHIERHUBER)

JURISIC, Boba (M. EBNER)  
RÖDLACH, Christine (O. KARAS)

**Secretariat**

LECOCQ, Yves (FACE)  
von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)  
de THIBAUT, Didrik (FACE)

## **1. Introduction and opening remarks**

M. EBNER, President Co-ordinator of the Intergroup, opens the meeting and welcomes all present and represented MEPs, as well as invited speakers, experts and guests. He points out that he finds it highly regrettable that Intergroups can no longer meet on the Wednesday of the plenary week in Strasbourg, which results in far less MEPs participating. He expresses the opinion that, as Intergroups play an important role to brief MEPs on a wide range of issues and constitute therefore an essential part of the democratic parliamentary process, it will be necessary to take the necessary measures to correct this situation. A. SCHIERHUBER expresses her full agreement with this view. After these opening remarks, Co-President H. GOUDIN takes over the chair. She welcomes the speakers and gives them the floor.

## **2. Challenges of hunting in Nordic countries**

In his presentation, T. MOLAND, President of the Norwegian Association of Hunters and Anglers, explains that hunting is a common activity in the Nordic countries and is part of the Nordic culture and national identities. There are around one million Nordic hunters, which represents nearly 5% of the total population. As game population surpluses exist during the autumn and early winter season for most species, these surpluses are harvested in a sustainable manner.

Hunters participate in the monitoring of game population, thereby contributing directly to their proper and scientific management. For instance, they are the prime providers for censuses for large carnivores. Nordic hunting organisations conduct many management-oriented projects on behalf of management agencies and they contribute to wildlife-related research. Swedish hunters donate annually around 400.000 euro on a voluntary basis and another 1.900.000 euro is being earmarked for wildlife research purposes out of the fees they pay for their hunting licence.

Cooperation with other stakeholders is crucial to the Nordic hunting associations. The cooperation involves both the relevant authorities and other organisations like landowners, nature conservationists and animal welfare societies. In addition, many of the hunting organisations have a public commission that organises the training of hunters, wildlife monitoring, research and service to the authorities. Education and training are in fact two of the most important activities for the Nordic hunters associations. They educate thousands of hunters, wildlife managers and nature enthusiasts with the objective to ensure that hunting ethics and morals are high and that the game is taken without unnecessary suffering.

Another key element is that game meat is an important staple in the households of many Nordic hunters. In Norway, for instance, game meat accounts for 3% of total meat consumption. In Finland, hunting contributes to more than 8 million kilograms of meat per annum, and in Sweden 70% of all households enjoys game meat at least once a year.

T. MÖRNER, President of the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management, informs the meeting on the issue of seal hunting and on the ban trade on seals products being called for by animal welfare groups. In Europe, the seal population - which is constituted by the grey seal and the ringed seal in the Baltic Sea, and in the harbour seal and the grey seal in the North Atlantic - is in balance. The situation is very different from one region to another as, whilst seals are being the subject of traditional hunting (complying to the animal welfare prescriptions) in the Baltic Sea, they are being eliminated according to a pest control scheme in the British Isles.

With regard to the EFSA scientific opinion which has been issued in December 2007 by the European Food Safety Agency regarding the “*Animal Welfare aspects of the killing of and skinning of seals*”, T. Mörner recalls that the EFSA is an agency which deals with the safety of food. As a result, the welfare of wild animals is not among its terms of reference. In addition, the directive regulating slaughter in abattoirs is not designed for wild animals.

Concerning the research study that has been submitted by COWI to DG Environment in January 2008 on the “*Assessment of the potential impact of a ban of products derived from seal species*”, the speaker deplors that only a small part of this work has been dedicated to the socio-economic impact of a possible ban on seal products. In fact, the study builds mainly upon the scientific opinion on animal welfare aspects of the killing and skinning of seals adopted by EFSA, which makes several comparisons between slaughter in abattoirs and hunting, whilst these activities cannot be compared since they are carried out under totally different conditions.

Today, Nordic seal hunting is a traditional activity carried out by local hunters under strict regulation and control. The seal populations are increasing. Five hundred animals are shot annually and their meat, skin and blubber are being used. In the case of the imposition of a trade ban on seal products, the control of the animal population – which is indispensable – will be carried out as a pest control scheme that will not take into account the welfare aspects and the sustainable use of the animals’ populations. It will furthermore have a negative impact on the living of the local people who obtain additional revenues from traditional seal hunting.

The speaker concludes by pointing out that, in ensuring the sustainability in the use of natural resources, it is of crucial importance that conservation and management are being carried out by people and not against them. The natural production must be appropriately harvested, the local people and traditions must be supported and the products from the animal must be used.

L. KONTRO, President of the Finnish Hunters’ Association, recalls that Northern Europe is the home of large carnivores: the “Big Four”, i.e. brown bear (*ursus arctos*), wolf (*canis lupus*), lynx (*lynx lynx*) and wolverine (*gulo gulo*) live in the Nordic countries. None of these species is endangered and all have sustainable populations – thanks to the good population management that has been carried out in these countries.

The bear, wolf, lynx and wolverine populations have grown in a sustainable way over the past few years. For example, the bear population in Sweden has grown from 1500 to almost 3000 bears in a few years time (2000-2008). The wolves in Finland have increased from less than 100 to almost 300 individuals in the same time. The Finnish and Swedish lynx and wolverine populations have grown the most during the past two years. There are almost 1500 lynxes in both of these countries. In Norway populations of all big four have been steady or grown slightly.

Nordic hunters support the idea of having viable populations of bear, wolf, lynx and wolverine in Europe, especially in North Europe. Today all of these populations are sustainable.

The Finnish and Norwegian wolf and brown bear populations are in contact with the large West Russian carnivore populations. The West Russian populations are connected to large carnivore populations in the Baltic countries as well. Bear, wolf and lynx populations are therefore very large in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Hunting is an important tool in managing large carnivore populations. Game authorities of Finland, Sweden and Norway have annually allowed a very limited quota for hunting of bear and lynx. Wolf and wolverine are strictly protected and killing is generally not possible. Authorities can permit derogations for problem individuals.

The large carnivores also cause problems. Last year, 4090 reindeer were killed by large carnivores in Finland, which is almost 1000 reindeer more than in the previous year. The Finnish state compensates the reported and verified losses of cattle and reindeer to farmers. Wolves also threaten the forest deer population which was saved from becoming extinct.

A good management policy requires the support of the public opinion because of the problems the large carnivores cause. Too large wolf populations cause fear and harm to rural people especially in Eastern Finland. A new trait in some wolves' behavior is their tendency to come and live close to villages. This is incompatible with their natural behavior and shows that a part of wolves is losing their natural wariness toward human beings. It is therefore very important that authorities permit killing of such problem individuals that cause damage to people.

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In the discussion that follows, G. de TÜRCKHEIM, President of FACE, expresses his appreciation for the quality of the presentations that were made. He regrets that, due to the organisational changes that have been decided upon by the Bureau of the Quaestors, there has not been a higher number of MEPs who were able to be present and stresses the necessity to do the necessary to revert that decision.

Concerning the issue of seal hunting, H. GOUDIN inquires about the status and the result of the consultation that has been carried out by the Commission last January. T. MÖRNER indicates that this survey had been conducted on the internet in English only. It came out that 70% of the answers that have been received came from one country (the USA) and were identical, which strongly suggest that were actually originating from the same source.

V. MATHIEU points out that, in her opinion, the result of this survey seems hardly reliable. She informs the meeting that she has recently been invited by the Canadian ambassador in Paris for an update on the situation at the occasion of which she met with Inuit's. The report that they have made on the issue very much differs from the information being given by the animal protection activists.

### **3. Any other business**

No other issues are raised

### **4. Next meeting**

H. GOUDIN thanks all guests and participants, and ends the meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2008** in Strasbourg.

D. de THIBAUT  
for the *IG Secretariat*