

# Coming to a Consensus about the Future of the Wolf in the Netherlands: a Conflict Assessment.



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Iris Bergers

**Radboud University**



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## Colophon

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Submitted by: Iris Bergers, s1086643.

Supervisor: Anne van Veen, [a.vanveen2@ru.nl](mailto:a.vanveen2@ru.nl) & Cebby Bliss, [cebuan.bliss@ru.nl](mailto:cebuan.bliss@ru.nl)

Second reader: Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers, [ingrid.visseren@ru.nl](mailto:ingrid.visseren@ru.nl)

Cover image: Meeting room called 'the wolf nest'. Author's own.

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## Summary

The return of wolves has led to missed reactions amongst stakeholders. Whereas some see the wolf as an asset to natural environments and an animal that should be strictly protected, others see it as a threat to their business or human safety and that should be managed to some extent. Discussion about how we should deal with the wolf is becoming more and more heated. Human-wildlife conflict, which is when wildlife and human goals hamper each other, is seen as one of the main threats to wildlife. Oftentimes though, conflict between humans and wildlife is really a manifestation of conflict between humans. Preventing further polarisation would be beneficial for both wolves and people, as in a polarised situation there is little opportunity for constructive dialogue which benefits all involved parties.

In the Netherlands, the provinces are responsible for the governance strategy regarding wolves. The Interprovincial Plan provides a common direction for the provinces on how to deal with the wolf, however a criticism on this governance strategy is that its agenda is limited and not all stakeholder groups are involved in the creation of this plan.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Royal Dutch Hunters' Society initiated a conflict assessment (which is the first step of a consensus building process), with the purpose of finding out whether it would be feasible and useful to bring together stakeholders for a broad societal dialogue on the future of the wolf in the Netherlands. This thesis studied that assessment. It asked who the main stakeholders are that should be involved in a societal dialogue on the future of the wolf, what their interests are regarding the wolf and whether negotiations might lead to consensus on the topic. A total of 35 stakeholders were identified. These stakeholders can be grouped under six categories: agriculture and other animal keepers, terrain managing organisations and landowners, nature and animal conservationists, nature and fauna management, recreational sector and tourism, governmental agencies and representatives. Three stakeholders did not fit any of these categories. The stakeholders represented twelve main interests that shape their positions regarding the wolf in the Netherlands. Many of these interests were held by stakeholders from multiple categories and none were impossible to reconcile with another. Nearly every stakeholder indicated a willingness to work with others to find mutually beneficial solutions. These findings lead to the conclusion that it might still be possible to reach consensus, if negotiations were to take place.

Furthermore, this thesis provided a reflection on some opportunities and challenges of using the proposed negotiation strategy (the Mutual Gains Approach) for this situation. The strategy seems to be appropriate for this topic, some stakeholders show a willingness to take the discussion away from positions and having participants from governmental agencies might be beneficial for the implementation of an agreement. Finally, the thesis reflects on whether a societal dialogue, if it were to take place, would adequately safeguard the interests of wolves, if considered from a critical theory perspective. This likely would not be the case, since most stakeholders do not represent the interests of individual wolves.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the result of six months of hard and very rewarding work. I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this project and getting to dive so deeply into the evolving conflict about the wolf in the Netherlands. It was extremely interesting to meet with so many people who each had different ideas and perspectives on the topic.

I have a lot of people to thank for this past half a year. First of all I want to thank my parents, for instilling in me a passion for nature and for always cheering me on. A special shout out to my dad especially for pointing out this amazing opportunity to me which led to my involvement with this project. Secondly, I want to thank my fellow ESS students (Anna, Anna, Irene, Leonie) for making the many days in the library enjoyable and giving me a reason not to work from home all the time. Thirdly, thank you to Rens for your interest in my work and for your eternal willingness to listen to my enthusiastic and/or frustrated rants that are a result of working on such a big project. Thank you to all interviewees who have told us about their perspectives, struggles and insights regarding the wolf with such clarity, enthusiasm, reason and passion. It has allowed me to grasp even more that there are always many sides to a story and none are better than another. Next, thank you Anne for your clear feedback and helping me to create a better and more interesting thesis than it would have been without your insights. Thank you Cebby for your comments and help also. Finally, the biggest thank you of all goes to Nanda and Steven, the assessors with whom I worked closely together for the past half a year, for showing me the ropes, for trusting in me, for challenging me and especially for teaching me so much in the process. I am truly grateful that I get to enter my professional career with what feels like a head start thanks to your guidance and willingness to involve me so deeply in this project.

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## 1. Problem statement and introduction to the project

In 2015, a wolf was spotted in the Netherlands for the first time in around 150 years. It did not take long for the first female wolf to settle in the country and a few years later, in 2019, the first litter was born on Dutch soil (Natuurmonumenten, n.d.). The return of the wolf has led to much societal unrest, with developments regarding their movement around the country, traffic deaths and attacks on farm animals being closely monitored and often making news headlines. As Trouwborst explains, “large carnivores are frequently subject to heated debates [...]. This is especially the case where predators return after a prolonged absence and humans are no longer used to living alongside them” (2010, p. 349). He also states: “Their presence may have consequences for farming (livestock as prey), hunting (competition for wild ungulates as prey), nature management and protection (impact on species and ecosystems), human (sense of) safety and recreation (predators discouraging or attracting tourism)” (Trouwborst, 2010, p. 349). Indeed, topics that are often discussed in the media include killings of livestock (e.g. RTL Nieuws, 2021), their potential threat to people and children (e.g. NOS, 2019) and recently the question has been raised whether the wolf was released in the Netherlands rather than it having arrived on its own strength (Werkhoven, 2022). It seems that the reappearance of the recently returned predator in the Netherlands is quite a polarising topic (De Bruijn, 2019), with some discussions narrowing down to those ‘pro’ and ‘against’ the wolf (Omroep Gelderland, 2021). As seen in other European countries where the wolf returned before it did in the Netherlands, there tends to be much disagreement on how to deal with this between rural and urban populations, or livestock farmers and conservationists (Eriksson, 2017; Skogen, 2015).

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Royal Dutch Hunters’ Association (Hunters’ Association) together have noted an increasingly polarising discussion regarding how to deal with the wolf in the Netherlands and have initiated preparations for a societal dialogue about this topic (IFAW, 2022). This dialogue would be a consensus seeking process, which has the goal of coming to an agreement that all parties are satisfied with (Susskind et al., 1999). The idea behind this is that if every stakeholder is content with the outcome of the process, conflict between stakeholders will diminish and solutions are more likely to be implemented (Fisher et al., 1991). If the dialogue were to take place, a Mutual Gains Approach (MGA) would be used as the method to reach consensus (see Fisher et al., 1991). Having a widely supported, societal consensus on how to deal with the wolf in the Netherlands will hopefully also prevent human-wildlife conflict between people (and their livestock) and the wolf. According to Noelle Aarts, the success of policy is dependent on the extent to which it is societally supported (1998). IFAW and the Hunters’ Association are hoping to bring together many parties with some stake in the governance of the wolf. At the time of writing this thesis, there are multiple governance strategies regarding the wolf in the Netherlands (one of all provinces combined and some from single provinces), but a widely supported societal consensus does not exist yet.

Currently, there are multiple platforms and organisations who are discussing the wolf and the implications of its return to the Netherlands – such as platform ‘Wolven in Nederland’ and ‘Landelijk Overleg Wolf’ – but none widely represent all relevant stakeholders, and they tend to focus on only some aspects within the wolf debate. The Landelijk Overleg Wolf brings together stakeholders to discuss how to deal with damage by wolves, Wolven in Nederland is a platform of parties who aim to create public support for the wolf and achieve harmonious coexistence between wolves and humans (BIJ12, n.d.; Wolven in Nederland, n.d.). Starting a discussion which includes (nearly) all stakeholder groups, thus making the debate even larger, might prove to be quite difficult for such a complex topic, even if time and money would not be an issue. This is why, prior to starting a societal dialogue, research is needed to understand whether there is a necessity to set up such a large-scale project and whether there is potential for all involved parties to come to a consensus on how to handle the return of the wolf to the Netherlands and how to shape its future here. If either of these things is not the case, it would be a waste of resources to set up a large-scale consensus seeking project, even creating a risk that the debate might polarise further. This assessment regarding a potential societal dialogue will be executed by Alcedo Consultancy BV. I am working with them as a research intern to uncover the potential of reaching a wide societal consensus regarding the wolf in the Netherlands. The first three research questions of this thesis are also answered in the assessment, the fourth is a reflection on the methodology (MGA) that was chosen to set up a dialogue striving for consensus in the context of this specific topic.

## **2. Research aim and research questions**

The main aim of this thesis is to uncover the potential to reach a widely supported consensus about how to deal with the (future of the) wolf in the Netherlands. In order to be able to set up a valid societal dialogue, which reflects society’s interests at large, the right stakeholders should be involved. Therefore, the first research question asks who should be invited to participate in such a process. Next, the interests of the different stakeholders regarding the wolf are looked at, which is necessary in order to answer research question 3. Why this is will be explained in detail in the theoretical framework (section 5), where literature on consensus seeking is discussed. Lastly, this research aims to shed some light on the opportunities and challenges of using MGA to structure the debate around this complex topic. This particular societal dialogue revolves around an animal<sup>1</sup> and involves many stakeholders, including governmental agencies. One might expect it to be difficult to get all parties to agree on something about which they have clearly conflicting opinions. This thesis will include a reflection on how successful the MGA might be at accomplishing this task and whether this approach is useful for topics which revolve around a stakeholder which from a practical perspective cannot be included as such (in this case, the wolf). Particular attention will be paid to

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘animal’ refers to non-human animals throughout this thesis.

the extent to which the interests of the wolf would be represented in case a consensus seeking process would take place.

1. Who are the main stakeholders to bring together for a societal dialogue about the future of the wolf in the Netherlands?
2. What are the underlying interests of different stakeholders that shape their positions regarding how to deal with the reappearance of the wolf in the Netherlands?
3. To what extent is there a potential to reach consensus about the future of the wolf in the Netherlands?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges of using a Mutual Gains Approach to structure the debate around this complex topic?
  - a. In case consensus building would take place regarding the future of the wolf in the Netherlands, would the interests of the wolf be adequately represented in this process from a critical theory perspective?

### **3. Scientific and societal relevance**

#### **3.1 Scientific relevance**

This project serves as an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of the MGA as a negotiation tool on a complex topic which has led to a widely divided public opinion. To my knowledge, this approach has not been used in order to reach consensus about wolf management in the Netherlands and other examples of Mutual Gains processes surrounding human-wildlife conflict are scarce (Moss et al., 2011). This assessment will allow us to get better insight into the value of this specific strategy in political processes that involve animals. Moreover, it will provide a reflection on the consequences of applying the MGA to a topic which revolves around a stakeholder which cannot itself participate, this being the wolf in the project under study.

#### **3.2 Societal relevance**

The societal relevance of this study is potentially quite large. As will be described in section 4.5, the twelve Dutch provinces are currently updating their governance strategy on how to deal with the return of the wolf. Different platforms, working groups, committees and coalitions have already been created to talk about and work on issues relating to the wolf and recently a proposal on changes to the Dutch governance strategy relating to the wolf was signed by 24 parties and sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (Federatie Particulier Grondbezit, 2022). There seems to be much dissatisfaction amongst stakeholders, often regarding the feeling their concerns are not appropriately being addressed (see for instance Land en Tuinbouw Organisatie Nederland, 2019). At the moment of writing this thesis, no policy exists on how to deal with the wolf in the Netherlands that broadly represents most, if not all, relevant stakeholders, even though the need for such a societal covenant seems to be high. While

the provinces are working on a more defined governance strategy, a covenant that represents as many relevant parties as possible might serve as highly valuable input. Since government agencies at all levels (the state Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, representatives for the provinces and the municipalities) are participating in the project, perhaps findings from the project under study might be used in future policy-making.

Moreover, this study reflects on the usefulness of the MGA on human-wildlife conflict across a large land area. If this approach indeed seems likely to be successful at creating consensus on such a complex and dividing topic, it might be applied to different topics as well.

## **4. Literature review**

In the upcoming literature review, relevant current knowledge to this research will be explained. First of all, literature on the return of large carnivores to Europe and the Netherlands and the societal response to this phenomenon will be summarised. Secondly, because the tension over the return of the wolf can (partially) be explained by the fact that the wolf might interfere with human goals, some information is provided on human-wildlife conflict, its consequences and how to deal with this friction. Thirdly, the project under study concerns many stakeholders, but it is of course not the first project attempting a transition involving a plethora of stakeholders and the government. Therefore, literature on transitions and large-scale debates is shortly looked into. Fourthly, the current governance situation relating to the wolf in the Netherlands is outlined, as this creates the boundaries within which the stakeholders are operating. Finally, literature on stakeholder identification is reviewed and some relevant stakeholder groups are identified based on the literature.

### **4.1 The return of large carnivores in the Anthropocene**

The return of the wolf to the Netherlands fits within a wider development where multiple large carnivore species are making a comeback in Europe (Cimatti et al., 2021). Not more than a few centuries ago, large carnivore species such as brown bears, the Eurasian lynx, wolverines and wolves were abundant across the continent (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). A combination of large-scale persecution, prey extermination, habitat loss and habitat fragmentation led to the near extinction of these predators, making their population sizes the smallest they had ever been in the twentieth century (Boitani & Linnell, 2015; Chapron et al., 2014). Especially the grey wolf (which is the species living on the European continent, also known as *canis lupus*) was driven to near extinction (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). Over the past few centuries, these large carnivores have been expanding across the continent again, not just in terms of numbers but also in their permanent range (Cimatti et al., 2021). This expansion is attributed for a large part to new protective legislation on national and European levels (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). Other contributing and interrelated factors include more positive public opinion regarding such species and land cover changes, for example lower pressure on forested land as a result of mass urbanization (Boitani & Linnell, 2015; Chapron et al., 2014; Cimatti et al., 2021).

Importantly, the recovery of these species is taking place in a ‘new’ Europe. Immense industrialisation and high population density have created a reality in which nearly all animal species on Earth are impacted by humans in some way (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). In the case of large carnivores this is the case, amongst other reasons, because of mankind’s impact on herbivore (i.e. prey) populations. Both indirect effects on vegetation such as climate change and long-term deposition of nitrogen and direct manipulations of habitats influence herbivore populations, which in turn affects predator species (Boitani & Linnell, 2015; Holland et al., 2005). Furthermore, domestic animals can compete with wild carnivores, for instance through competition for prey (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). Moreover, human presence or activity is known to disturb the behaviour of large carnivores (Moen et al., 2012).

Of course, the return of large carnivores means that humans have had to readjust to coexistence with large predators. This has proven to be difficult, despite increased human tolerance for wildlife over the past decades which led to more protective legislation and other efforts to stimulate population growth (Boitani & Linnell, 2015). To look back on the words of Arie Trouwborst, previously included in the introduction, “their presence may have consequences for farming (livestock as prey), hunting (competition for wild ungulates as prey), nature management and protection (impact on species and ecosystems), human (sense of) safety and recreation (predators discouraging or attracting tourism)” (2010, p. 349). These consequences often lead to societal tensions. Generally speaking, resistance against the return of large carnivores, including wolves, is highest in rural areas. A study from Sweden found a strong positive correlation between positive attitudes towards wolves and the distance between them and the nearest wolf territory (Karlsson & Sjöström 2007). Specifically relating to the wolf, Pettersson and colleagues (2021) state: “reintegrating wolves in human-dominated landscapes is a major challenge, particularly in places where memories and experience of coexistence have been lost” (para. 1). Van Herzele and Aarts identified three points of controversy which return in nearly every public debate regarding the return of wildlife. First of all, opinions differ on whether or not that particular species belongs to the area it is returning to. Secondly, there is disagreement on whether the animal is an asset or a threat. Lastly, there tends to be disagreement on whether the species should be managed through human intervention, or if we should let natural processes hamper population numbers (Van Herzele & Aarts, 2019).

The Netherlands is no exception to this. There is no consensus on when a wolf last roamed the Netherlands, with estimates ranging from the 1820s to the 1880s, but most sources point at a wolf which was shot in 1845 near Schinveld as the last specimen to be killed on Dutch soil (De Rijk, 1985). The species had been expelled from the country by individual hunters and organised group ‘wolf hunts’. The removal of wolves from the country was seen as a national interest, because they were responsible for many losses among livestock, such as sheep, pigs and goats, but also sometimes cows or horses. In some areas where hunting was prominent, such as the Veluwe and the Province of Overijssel, there were complaints about the disturbance to and deaths of so-called ‘game’ animals brought about by wolves (De Rijk, 1985). For these reasons, premiums were paid for successful hunters by the State treasury, sometimes as high as the yearly

wage of an average worker. In the Provinces of Brabant and Limburg, those who managed to kill a wolf would take their kill around different villages, receiving small premiums at each village, illustrating inhabitants' appreciation for wolf catchers (De Rijk, 1985). Fitting within a wider trend of recovering large carnivore species across Europe, the grey wolf was spotted in the Netherlands for the first time in approximately a century and a half in 2015 (Wolven in Nederland, n.d.). After multiple roaming wolves had walked across the Netherlands across a few years' time, the first female wolf settled in the country in 2018 (Wolven in Nederland, n.d.). The return of wolves to the Netherlands is attributed to strict protection at a European level and often described as a success story of nature management in the Netherlands (Trouwborst & Bastmeijer, 2015; RTL Nieuws, 2018).

As is often the case when large predators make a comeback, the return of the wolf led to upheaval in the country. The discovery that wolves were spotted in the Netherlands was “met with a mixture of fascination, excitement and anxiety” (Drenthen, 2015, p. 319). To begin with, it was a surprise that a wolf would even return to the Netherlands, it being one of the most densely populated countries in the world. When it became clear that the wolf was going to stay and it was being spotted more frequently close to roads and sometimes passing through towns, an emotionally charged debate started forming. Concerns about the safety of livestock, but also of people, were raised and many found the wolf to have no place in the densely populated cultural landscapes of the Netherlands. On the other side of the debate, the wolf was seen as a representation of the return of ‘true’ nature to the country and was welcomed with open arms. Many of such self-declared ‘wolf lovers’ would defend the animal against any criticism and downplay its core characteristic of being a hunter (Drenthen, 2015). Information spread by experts was quickly challenged, such as whether the wolves on Dutch soil were as shy of humans as was claimed and whether they came on their own accord. Just as is the case in other countries, in the Netherlands too it seems that opposition against wolves is strongest in rural areas. Studies done at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality show that the majority of Dutch inhabitants support the return of the wolf to the country (Van der Grient & Kamphuis, 2020a; Van der Grient & Kamphuis, 2020b). A more recent study done by Kieskompas shows that inhabitants of rural areas tend to disagree more with the statement “the wolf belongs in the Netherlands” than those in urban areas. It is also clear that people from provinces where the wolf is already present and killing livestock are least positive towards the animal returning to the country (Kieskompas, 2022).

### **Figure 1**

*Wolf-proof fencing protecting a herd of sheep. Author's own.*



#### **4.2 Human-wildlife conflict or human-human conflict?**

As mentioned previously, the return of the wolf to the Netherlands has led to much societal unrest and media attention. Martin Drenthen theorises that the Dutch society struggles relatively much with the return of the wolf to the country due to the way it challenges their possibility to keep things under control:

The Netherlands is known as a country with one of the best organised and most well-ordered spatial planning in the world. Accordingly, each newly arrived species is also being met with planning, contingency plans, stakeholder meetings and legislation. [...] The attempt to regulate the wolf with a management plan might be seen as a forced attempt to ‘normalize’ the wolf, and to impose order on the wildness of nature. Underneath the wolf plan seems to lie a fear that the wolf will not be controllable, that it can destabilize society by causing social conflicts, and can force us to change our lives. [...] Wolves are symbols of the return of vital nature, and represent that part of the world that lies beyond our control. (2015, pp. 329 – 330)

Other authors also point out that the wolf is a highly mythical animal, sometimes being romanticised as a symbol for ‘wild nature’ or as an embodiment of the ideal person, or contrarily as a vicious hunter or pure evil (Marvin, 2010; Robisch, 2009; Vinckx, 2018). It seems that large groups of people are worried for the well-being of farm animals, but also of people and children. This friction between human beings and wolves can be seen as an example of human-wildlife conflict. Human-wildlife conflict occurs when wildlife has negative impacts on goals of humans, or these goals negatively impact the needs of wildlife (Madden, 2004). For example, human-wildlife conflict may occur when wildlife kills or harms livestock, damages crops or threatens or kills people. Human-wildlife conflict is put forward as one of the main threats facing many wildlife species (Dickman, 2010).

A recent WWF report on human-wildlife conflict describes the wolf as one species over which tense and political conflict can arise (Gross et al., 2021). In order to prevent conflict between people and the wolf, it is important that local people do not feel as though the needs of the wolf are prioritised over their own, and that local institutions and people have the ability to deal with the conflict (Madden, 2004). In the words of Dickman, “human–wildlife conflicts are often manifestations of underlying human–human conflicts, such as between authorities and local people, or between people of different cultural backgrounds” (2010, p. 458). Indeed, Martin Drenthen raises the question whether the potential escalation really revolves around the wolf. “I am thinking more and more that the escalation is really about polarisation between different groups: lack of understanding and acknowledgement between parties” (personal communication, June 2, 2022).

It thus seems logical to conclude from this that further polarisation should be prevented. Stakeholders with interests regarding the wolf in the Netherlands should be brought together. Ideally, these parties are a good reflection of societal sectors that have some stake in wolf governance. According to WWF, tensions surrounding the wolf in Norway are an accidental result of focusing wolf conflict management mainly on farmers, while neglecting concerns of other affected parties, such as hunters and landowners (Gross et al., 2021).

#### **4.3 Societal dialogues concerning many stakeholders**

The societal dialogue that IFAW and the Hunters’ Association are hoping to establish fits in a long tradition of consensus seeking processes in the Netherlands. In fact, the country is well known for its ‘polder model’ governance style (Dekker et al., 2017). This style of governance is characterised by tripartite cooperation between the state, business and civil society. It tends to be used for wage negotiations, but has also been applied to environmental planning, as was the case in the creation of the first National Environmental Policy Plan of 1989 (Schreuder, 2001). Large-scale, organised societal dialogues have taken place amongst stakeholders more often, most famously between employers’ organisations and employee organisations about working conditions in 1982 (Evers & Susskind, 2006). It should be noted here that dialogues that follow the ‘polder model’ are similar to those following the MGA, but there are still some important differences. Both acknowledge the interests that underlie the different parties’ positions, but in mutual gains negotiations solutions are drafted in such a way that no party has to make concessions to their interests (Evers & Susskind, 2006). The MGA will be explained in detail in the theoretical framework.

Such societal dialogues (as the ones fitting in the Dutch ‘polder model’) are in line with a tradition of decreasing hierarchical power of governments. Literature from political science suggests that in increasingly complex societies, which have to deal with more and more so-called ‘wicked problems’, top-down hierarchical decision-making is increasingly replaced by ‘new governance’. This new governance constitutes a non-hierarchical mode of decision-making, which often includes collaboration between the state, market and civil society (Rhodes, 2012;

Richardson, 2012). A common criticism on the dealing with societal issues in collaborative processes is that they are generally led by experts, or organised groups which constitute the ‘usual subjects’, and laymen are not invited to participate; or that there tends to be little critical reflection on who is invited to participate (Lawhon & Murphy, 2012; Voß et al., 2009). One alternative to the ‘rule of experts’ has recently gained in popularity, namely so-called G1000 citizen summits (Boogaard et al., 2016). In such deliberative processes, hundreds of citizens come together to discuss certain topics. However, they do not seem to be the cure-all to the raised criticisms on ‘regular’ collaborative processes, as there tends to little diversity in the participants, with the average participant being over 50 years old and highly educated (Michels & Binnema, 2016).

Such a tendency towards increasingly collaborative governance strategies is not confined to the Netherlands: “At the EU level we can see a system of governance in the sense that it is nonhierarchical, generally non-impositional [...], and is underpinned by a need (and desire) to proceed by consensual agreement” (Richardson, 2012, p. 8). In the Netherlands, the provinces are in charge over nature management, including how to deal with the wolf. The topic thus concerns a governmental task. Nevertheless, the project under study is not organised in a top-down manner (it was not requested by a governmental institution). On the contrary, governmental institutions are involved in the project as stakeholders, whose insights bear equal weight as those of other organisations.

Literature on consensus building processes states that government agencies can be useful participants to such processes (Susskind et al., 1999). Especially when certain agencies hold the responsibilities over regulations, it is important to involve them in the process, so that execution of the agreement is more likely to take place. Of course, there are some issues relating to government participation in consensus building processes that should be carefully considered. First of all, there would be a clear difference in power between the participants at the table in case some are in charge of policy formation. This should in theory not be too problematic, as mutual gains negotiations are structured in such a way that every stakeholder’s interest should be safeguarded and participants are ought to commit a priori to the outcome of the process. Moreover, ideally a governmental institution would delegate technical staff to participate in the process and have regulatory staff (who are not involved in the process and asked not to communicate about it with their colleagues) advise decision-makers on the outcome. A second issue is that often government representatives cannot promise that their agency will commit to the agreement, since “governmental powers often cannot be transferred to a single individual” (Susskind et al., 1999, p. 507). Two proposed solutions to this problem are the possibility of phased implementation of the agreement, meaning that parties are only required to fulfil their end of the deal after the government has fulfilled theirs; and the option of reaching a conditional settlement, meaning government participants should formally ratify the agreement within their agency, before everybody is bound to its terms (Susskind et al., 1999).

Below, the current governance situation regarding the wolf in the Netherlands is briefly outlined.

#### **4.4 Current governance situation regarding the wolf in the Netherlands**

Considering there had not been a wolf in the Netherlands for around 150 years, at the time a wolf returned to the country, there was no national policy on how to deal with this large predator. The Dutch government relied on European policy regarding the wolf, but as of 2019, when the wolf had already settled, an Interprovincial Plan was published (IPO, 2019). In this plan, a governance strategy is outlined in more detail than what is prescribed by European policy.

In all of the European Union, the wolf has a protected status, as detailed in the Convention of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Convention 104) and article IV of the European Union's Habitat Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC, 1992). The Netherlands has incorporated these mandates into its own national 'Nature Conservation Act', which will be the 'Environmental Act' (Omgevingswet) as of July 1, 2022 (Rijksoverheid, n.d.; Wet natuurbescherming, 2015). Member states are allowed to create their own plans regarding the execution of these mandates, for example outlining the circumstances under which an animal may be lethally managed, although there are also conditions attached to this (Boerema et al., 2021). Other relevant law in the Netherlands is the 'decision animal keepers' (Besluit houders van dieren, 2014) and the 'animal act' (Wet dieren, 2011). These laws state that keepers of animals must protect their animals, when not kept indoors, from predators. Compensation is provided for farmers whose animals were killed. For this purpose of creating more clarity regarding how to deal with the execution of international and national mandates, the Interprovincial Plan was created in 2019 (IPO, 2019).

The provinces in the Netherlands bear the responsibility of executing governance strategies relating to the wolf. This includes for example species protection, monitoring and compensation for damage (IPO, 2019). Usually, the provinces would create their own policy, but because the wolf is hypermobile, it was deemed useful to draft a common strategy between all twelve provinces. The Interprovincial Plan aims to give direction to the provinces on how to deal with their responsibilities related to the wolf. Topics discussed in the plan are legal protection of the wolf, compensation for harm to farm animals and monitoring (IPO, 2019). This plan is being revised at the time of writing this thesis, and an updated version will be published around September or October 2022. A criticism on this governance strategy is that its agenda is rather limited, mostly focusing on how the agricultural sector might deal with the return of the wolf to the Netherlands. Questions relating to the protection of livestock and compensation for animals that were harmed or killed are thought out, but some population sub-groups that have an interest in the developments regarding the wolf, such as tourists and nature lovers are not represented in this strategy. The Interprovincial Plan is created using input from the Landelijk Overleg Wolf, which includes terrain managers, nature conservationists, animal conservationists and the agricultural sector (BIJ12, n.d.). Relevant input from for example entrepreneurs in the tourist sector in areas where the wolf is settling or recreationists is not included. In case a societal dialogue were to take place as a result of the assessment, many topics might be discussed. For

example, negotiations could revolve around the use of information regarding the wolf, zoonosis, wolf-dog hybridisation or any other topic that the stakeholders deem important. The topics that should be included in a covenant would be decided by the stakeholders themselves.

#### **4.5 Which stakeholders should be invited?**

A crucial question in setting up a negotiation project surrounding the question of how to deal with the return of the wolf to the Netherlands is which stakeholders to invite to the table. According to the Consensus-Building Handbook, “a bedrock principle [of consensus seeking] is that everyone with a stake in the decision should be represented at the table. [...] This principle helps to ensure that any consensus agreement reached will be seen as legitimate by all relevant parties and have broad support when implemented” (Susskind et al., 1999, p. 185). Similarly, Fisher and colleagues argue that stakeholders who did not get a say in the drafting of an agreement will likely reject proposals (1991). It is thus apparent that for a negotiation process to be legitimate and for its outcomes to be promoted and executed by stakeholders, the relevant parties should participate. This will make a societal dialogue, in case one were to take place, meaningful. There is some literature available on methods of stakeholder identification, but oftentimes different studies or projects tend to include only some parts of this literature or adapt it to their circumstances.

Colvin and colleagues identified different approaches to stakeholder identification in environmental and natural resource management. First, they distinguish between ‘scientific’ approaches and ‘art’ approaches (Colvin et al., 2016). Taking an ‘art’ approach means making use of previous experiences of the practitioner doing the stakeholder identification, or using intuition to come up with potential stakeholders. A ‘scientific’ approach follows specific procedures. This can be further divided up into top-down processes, called ‘seeking’, and bottom-up processes, called ‘creating’ (Colvin et al., 2016). When ‘seeking’ for stakeholders, the practitioner looks into society to discover stakeholders, for instance through a media search or by approaching key informants and asking stakeholders to direct the practitioner to other stakeholders (this is called snowballing). When ‘creating’, the practitioner “look[s] toward the landscape of relevance and the project or issue to construct templates for stakeholder identification” (Colvin et al., 2016, p. 272). This can be done, for example, by analysing (expected) interests relating to a certain issue, thereby logically identifying relevant stakeholders. This can be a quite informal process, for instance through brainstorming. There is no ‘right’ way to go about stakeholder identification, each of the described approaches has its own downsides. An art approach can be seen as unscientific and too dependent on the practitioner’s past experiences. One should not just assume that the initiator or facilitator of the project can uncover all stakeholders or stakeholder groups by themselves, but rather ask participating stakeholders for their input and reflections on which other parties should be invited (Susskind et al., 1999). When taking a creating approach, practitioners can also have a large influence on which stakeholders are identified. When solely seeking for stakeholders, it is easy to uncover only those

pre-existing structures within society which are already involved with projects relating to the topic of study and fail to go beyond the usual suspects (Colvin et al., 2016). If seeking approaches are used, Reed and Curzon promote using both media searches and snowballing to lower the risk of finding just the usual subjects (2015).

Billgren and Holmén (2007) highlighted some common issues in stakeholder identification processes. One is that, often, only organised groups are represented. Literature seems to inadequately address how those who are not formally organised can be represented, or how the silent majority can be involved. From a practical perspective, it is nearly impossible to include all these potential stakeholders. In theory, oftentimes literally everybody could be regarded as a stakeholder (Colvin et al., 2016). Doing consensus building with millions of Dutch inhabitants at the table is of course not possible. All that can be done is to undertake regular external communication during the process. Another common issue to stakeholder identification is that it is hard to make sure that spokespersons really speak on the behalf of the group they represent (Billgren & Holmén, 2007). This issue actually seems to be more of an issue regarding *participants* of the project. There is literature available on how to address this concern in consensus building processes, but this is not relevant for this thesis (see Susskind et al., 1999).

Much of the literature on this topic has a practical approach. The way in which participants are selected in consensus seeking processes is outlined in the methodology section (6). Here, it will also be explained in more detail which combination of the described approaches to stakeholder identification were used in the project under study.

In order to get a first idea of major groups with an interest in the wolf (see the theoretical framework in Section 5 for operationalisations), we can look back at the previously used quote by Trouwborst on the return of wolves to Western Europe: “their presence may have consequences for farming (livestock as prey), hunting (competition for wild ungulates as prey), nature management and protection (impact on species and ecosystems), human (sense of) safety and recreation (predators discouraging or attracting tourism)” (2010, p. 349). Indeed, the agricultural sector seems a logical stakeholder. Currently in the Netherlands, it is especially sheep farmers who have felt concrete losses as a result of returning wolves. Next, nature and terrain managers constitute an obvious stakeholder group, as the return of this large carnivore will influence ecosystems in the Netherlands and therefore different nature management choices must be made. Moreover, nature conservationists have a stake due to their interest in preserving certain animal species (such as the wolf) or ecosystems in general (which the wolf might influence). Trouwborst also mentions hunters as potentially conflicting with wolves, since wolves hunt the same game which hunters do. This does not appear to be an argument that is used much, but hunters have pointed out the fact that the presence of wolves makes the behaviour of prey animals such as ungulates much more unpredictable. This makes it more difficult for hunters to keep populations at the numbers which are agreed upon by policy makers and desired by nature management. Finally, Trouwborst points out the potential influence that the return of this large carnivore might have on the recreational sector. A study done at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality shows that about one fifth

of the Dutch population would avoid visiting a natural area if they knew a wolf was settled there (Van der Grient & Kamphuis, 2020a). On the other hand, nearly half the population indicated they would love to encounter a wolf in the wild (Van der Grient & Kamphuis, 2020a). These findings show that the presence of wolves in certain areas might certainly affect the recreational sector in those places, due to people deciding to visit more or less often.

Regarding the wolf in the Netherlands, analysis of current news items, existing platforms relating to the topic and other insights, the following stakeholder groups were identified before starting the project: farmers and keepers of livestock, nature organisations, animal (welfare) organisations, representatives for the recreational sector, representatives for recreationists, land owners, political executives, hunters and other parties who have strong opinions on the matter. Some types of actors were excluded from this list, such as political parties and knowledge institutions. These actors do not have an interest of their own related to the wolf. Political parties represent certain groups of people in society, whose views are also represented in the societal organisations which do have interests of their own. A similar reasoning can be applied to knowledge institutions, these parties are merely interested in providing accurate information and understanding, how we deal with the wolf does not impact their interest.

Thus far, one important stakeholder has not been brought up, which is the wolf itself. Of course, participating in a consensus seeking process is not an option for an animal, but its interests might be represented by humans. Literature on animal participation in political processes has recently been growing (see for instance Donaldson, 2020). This aspect to this particular consensus seeking process, which revolves around an animal species, will be reflected upon further in the theoretical framework.

## **5. Theoretical framework**

This section outlines the theories which underlie this research. First of all, the assessment concerns the first steps of a consensus seeking process. Therefore, much of the methodology regarding, for instance, identification of the right stakeholders and data collection comes from literature on consensus seeking. Later steps in this process include the actual negotiation (or conflict resolution). The strategy which would be applied for the negotiations is called the Mutual Gains Approach. Theory on consensus seeking and the Mutual Gains Approach will be explained in some detail, after briefly describing some alternative well-known dispute resolution strategies. Secondly, as this specific consensus seeking process revolves around the wolf, insights on the usage of animal stakeholders in political processes are relevant to include. A reflection on this project is based on theory on political animals. Thirdly, the research philosophies underlying the project methodology and the research philosophy used for the reflections of research question 4 are shortly explained. Finally, operationalisations of relevant concepts to this thesis are included at the end of this section.

## 5.1 How to prevent conflict around the wolf in the Netherlands?

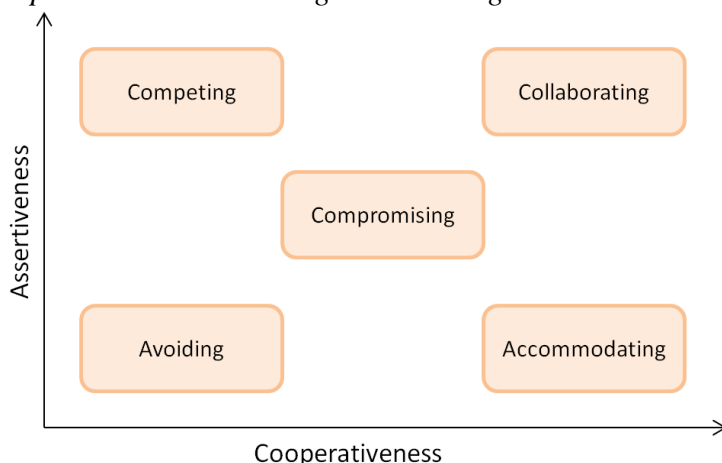
The wolf is causing mixed reactions amongst Dutch citizens and the debate about how we should handle its return is becoming increasingly polarised (AD, 2022; de Bruijn, 2019; van Rosmalen, 2021). Considering that human-wildlife conflict is seen as a major threat to many wildlife species and human-wildlife conflict can often be better understood as conflict between people, as is currently growing in the Netherlands, it seems imperative to prevent further polarisation (Dickman, 2010). In order for the dispute between those ‘pro’ and ‘contra’ the wolf and those who hold more nuanced positions to be resolved, agreement should be reached between relevant parties. In 2019, European ministers of agriculture and fishery stated that the return of the wolf is leading to mixed reactions among the public, and a broader debate about how we might deal with large carnivores would be welcome (Schouten, 2019). But how the dispute be prevented from escalating into conflict? Much literature can be found on dispute resolution, also known as conflict resolution or conflict management. For the purpose of this study, only literature on conflict resolution between groups is relevant (in contrast to intragroup conflict resolution). There is a plethora of different strategies to resolve disputes, some of the most well-known theories and strategies will be highlighted.

### 5.1.1 The Dual Concerns Model

Arguably the most commonly used theory within this subject area is the Dual Concerns Model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Shell, 2001). This model distinguishes five different strategies for interpersonal conflict resolution, using two dimensions. The first dimension is assertiveness, or the concern for one’s own outcomes in a conflict, and the second dimension is cooperativeness, or the concern for the other’s outcomes in a conflict. One’s dispute resolution strategy depends on the extent to which one has assertive and cooperative intentions in a dispute (see Figure 2) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974).

**Figure 2**

*Dispute Resolution Strategies according to the Dual Concerns Model (Thomas & Killman, 1974)*



An avoidant approach aims to prevent any conflict from taking place, which might be argued to be a good thing, but will likely leave the avoidant person feeling disappointed with the outcome. An accommodating strategy prioritises the other's needs and wants, meaning this person will likely not get to fulfil their own goals in the dispute. A competing strategy prioritises one's own needs and wants, pushing for accommodation by the other. This might be advantageous when stakes are high, but can more easily damage the relationship between parties or intensify the conflict (Shell, 2001). A compromising strategy attempts to find some middle ground between the parties, which can be seen as fair, but also likely to leave both parties somewhat disappointed, as they have had to make concessions (Rouméas, 2021). Lastly, a collaborating strategy digs into an issue with the goal to completely satisfy both one's own goals and the other's. It will likely take more time to come to agreement using this strategy, but in theory it would leave the involved parties most satisfied.

### 5.1.2 Positional negotiation

Thomas and Kilmann's Dual Concerns Model is useful in that it outlines very general tactics for approaching a dispute. Most commonly, negotiations centre around the involved parties' positions or standpoints (Fisher et al., 1991). Say, for example, a trade union is negotiating better salaries for teachers with employers. Their position is that salaries should increase across the sector by at least five percent for all teaching staff in primary and high schools. The employers on the other hand, are not willing, or capable, to increase salaries by more than two percent. Their positions thus are opposed and difficult to reconcile. Fisher et al. (1991) describe two ways in which these parties might approach the negotiations: soft positional bargaining and hard positional bargaining. Soft positional bargaining is similar to the cooperative dimension in the Dual Concern Model. The main aim within this strategy is to reach agreement and concessions can be made in order to maintain or cultivate the relationship with the other(s). People who participate in soft positional bargaining are more inclined to give up their own position and search for an agreement that the other will accept. Hard positional bargaining on the other hand can be compared to the assertive dimension in the Dual Concern Model. People who engage in hard positional negotiation aim to 'win' and are more likely to pressure the other into giving up their stance. They might demand concession in order to maintain the relationship and are only looking for an agreement which they themselves would be happy with (Fisher et al., 1991). Both of these strategies have their advantages and disadvantages. If your positions are very important to you, you might get a deal that honours them more quickly using hard positional negotiation. If the relationship with the other party is very important to you, you might more easily keep them happy by adopting a soft bargaining strategy. However, in any case, positional bargaining will likely "reflect a mechanical splitting of the difference between final positions rather than an solution carefully crafted to meet the legitimate interests of the parties. The result is frequently an agreement less satisfactory to each side than it could have been"

(Fisher et al., 1991, p. 5). Moreover, the more parties are involved in a discussion, the more difficult it will become to reach an agreement that satisfies everybody's positions.

### 5.1.3 Majority rule

Bargaining and negotiation would usually end in agreement, with the involved parties being more or less content with the agreement. Another widely used strategy to come to a decision in a dispute is through voting, or majority rule. This principle is extensively described in Robert's Rules of Order (Robert, 2020). Robert's Rules of Order detail procedures for dealing with issues in a group meeting and it is currently still the predominant approach to meetings in the US (Atlee et al., 2012). The rules explain procedures on raising proposals, discussing and amending them and taking a vote. They allow for decisions to be made in a timely and orderly manner. In this case, not everybody has to agree with an outcome for it to become accepted. This is seen as acceptable, as it is assumed that the majority is capable of coming to the best conclusion. But it can also leave many participants – the minority – feeling upset or disappointed, leaving a negotiation or debate with little to show for their efforts (Susskind et al., 1999). Other criticism on this strategy is that “the focus on a single proposal per topic can preclude the possibility of totally different and far better solutions emerging and being considered [and] it's more about decision-making than listening to each other or generating breakthrough ideas” (Atlee et al., 2012).

### 5.1.4 Hierarchical decision-making

The final dispute resolution strategy to be explained does not necessarily entail any negotiation or debate. The government could apply top-down policy making, meaning what they say, goes. However, as described before, complex situations like the return of large predators and its consequences for different stakeholder groups are generally not seen as suitable for top-down decision making. Indeed, in situations of high uncertainty; such as how a wolf population would develop and act within the densely populated landscape of the Netherlands, groups are more often driven to collaborate (Emerson et al., 2012). If parties had perfect understanding of the problem and its solutions, they would act independently to fulfil their own agendas (Emerson et al., 2012). Moreover, if stakeholders are not involved in decision making processes, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with the outcome and less willing to execute the policy. Stakeholder involvement is seen to “improve the quality and sustainability of policy decisions” (NEA, 2015, p. 17). Indeed, dissatisfaction about the extent to which concerns of stakeholders were addressed in the current policy on wolves in the Netherlands has already been expressed (see Land en Tuinbouworganisatie Nederland, 2019). Therefore, hierarchical decision-making can be seen as an alternative dispute resolution, but it likely will not actually decrease dispute in this situation.

## 5.2 Consensus seeking

The project under study will try to prevent conflict and bring parties in conversation about how to deal with the wolf in the Netherlands through a consensus seeking process. Consensus seeking is also known as consensus building, these two will be used interchangeably. For this study specifically, insights from consensus building literature will be used to uncover the potential for stakeholders to come to an agreement on governance relating to the return of the wolf. In contrast to positional negotiation, this approach does not require making a trade-off between getting what you want and maintaining a good relationship with the other party or parties (Fisher et al., 1991). When dealing with highly complex and dividing topics, it can be difficult reaching a satisfying conclusion for all involved parties after negotiation. Consensus seeking attempts to provide a method for negotiation that allows for agreement to be reached which is satisfactory to all parties, also known as building consensus (Susskind et al., 1999). At the basis of such an approach is the aim to create value for all parties (Movius et al., 2006). This is possible, if one accepts that *interests* shape one's *position* in a debate. Uncovering common interests can lead to a successful agreement which is nearly self-enforcing, because they meet the interests and needs of all parties (Friedman, 1993). In the words of Friedman,

In traditional bargaining [...], negotiators present positions: they “demand” particular changes in contract language or a certain level of wage increase. Moreover, they hide their real concerns – what they want or are willing to accept – during most of the negotiations. The danger of this approach is that both sides become locked into defending or rejecting particular positions, even though these are not what they really care about. (1993, p. 436)

Susskind and his colleagues at the Consensus Building Institute created the Mutual Gains Approach (MGA), which is a four-step prescriptive model to negotiation based on these insights. The MGA constitutes the actual negotiation part of the entire consensus seeking process. The four stages are:

- preparation,
- creating value,
- distributing value
- and follow-through (Consensus Building Institute, 2014).

This research only looks into the potential for successful consensus seeking regarding the wolf in the Netherlands. In consensus seeking terminology, it is about the ‘conflict assessment’ which precedes the actual negotiation (or value creation and distribution stages). The point of such an assessment is to uncover the relevant stakeholders, speak to them all once individually and find out whether starting a consensus seeking negotiation project might be worthwhile. How exactly this is done will be detailed in the methodology section (6). However, despite the fact that the core of the strategy is not included in this study, understanding of the MGA and its up-

and downsides is needed in order to make an adequate assessment regarding the opportunities and challenges of using this approach to prevent conflict about the wolf in the Netherlands.

### 5.2.1 Preparation

The first step for participants engaging in a mutual gains negotiation is preparation (Consensus Building Institute, 2014). One important aspect to preparation is consideration of your interests. Even experienced negotiators might not explicitly be aware of the interests they are serving (Forester & Weiser, 1996). An easy assumption to make in negotiation is that the interests of the other are opposed to yours, because their position is opposed to yours (Fisher et al., 1991). In reality, however, oftentimes many interests are shared between parties, even if their positions are opposed. One position can serve multiple underlying interests and conversely one interest can be met through different positions (Fisher et al., 1991). Therefore, carefully considering the interests you are trying to meet and the ones the other will likely try to meet might very well allow you to discover some overlap between your goals. The proposed way to go about this is simply by asking ‘why?’ and ‘why not?’ (Fisher et al., 1991). Carefully considering why someone might make a certain demand, or refuses to give into your demand might provide some insights into their interests. You can also ask the other(s) about their needs and desires, rather than assuming. The next important aspect to preparation is developing a so-called Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) (Fisher et al., 1991). This is “the standard against which any proposed agreement should be measured. [It] is the only standard which can protect you both from accepting terms that are too unfavourable and from rejecting terms it would be in your interest to accept” (Fisher et al., 1991, p. 104). Developing a BATNA means deciding what your best option would be in case no agreement would be reached in negotiation. This provides negotiating power or the consolidation in knowing that you will be okay if the negotiation does not lead to a satisfactory outcome (Fisher et al., 1991). One’s BATNA can be developed by exploring alternative ways to meet their interests without reaching agreement with other parties. Considering what the other’s BATNA can help a negotiation party discover what they might expect from the other(s) (Consensus Building Institute, 2014; Fisher et al., 1991). Lastly, after consideration of your and their interests and BATNAs, you can prepare for the negotiation by already starting to think of mutually beneficial options (Consensus Building Institute, 2014).

### 5.2.2. Creating value

The second step in the MGA is creating value (Consensus Building Institute, 2014). Quite often, negotiators fail to reach agreements that have optimal outcomes for all parties (Fisher et al., 2019). This is the case for four different reasons: (perceived) criticism and judgement of ideas hinders creative thinking; people search for the single best answer from the outset of negotiation, rather than exploring multiple options; the assumption that a negotiation is

essentially about dividing up a fixed pie – i.e. more for the other means less for me – hinders exploration of more options; thinking that it is not up to you to solve the other’s problems leads to coming up with solutions that only satisfy one party (Fisher et al., 1991). In order to create value and come up with a satisfactory agreement for everyone, different options should be invented and explored, without committing to them and without criticising them (Consensus Building Institute, 2014; Fisher et al., 1991). The purpose of inventing these options is not to look for the best solution, but only to create ‘room’ in which the negotiation can take place. Then, the core of this negotiation strategy is applied, namely the invention of options that provide mutual gain. According to literature on consensus seeking, a successful negotiation ‘enlarges the pie’, rather than dividing up a fixed pie (Susskind et al., 1999). This can be done by packaging together different issues and sub-issues, which allows for the creation of solutions in which parties trade across issues that they value differently (Susskind et al., 1999). According to Fisher and colleagues, differences often allow for agreement (1991). For example, differences in interests make it possible to create ‘packages’ of solutions in which everybody’s interests are met. Negotiators can also make use of differences in value placed on things like time and risk to create an agreement that is satisfactory to all (Fisher et al., 1991).

### 5.2.3 Distributing value

The third step in the MGA is distributing value (Consensus Building Institute, 2014). This is about finding “objective criteria that all parties can use to justify their ‘fair share’ of the value created” (Consensus Building Institute, 2014, p. 1). To this end, standards must be agreed upon that all parties are content with. Successfully identifying fair standards will help protect any agreement made from criticism, also from the constituents the participants might be representing. Making a decision based on objective criteria makes the participants seem reasonable, rather than weak for giving up some of their positions and helps protect relationships between negotiators (Fisher et al., 1991). It is also possible to ask neutral outsiders to suggest potential distributions (Consensus Building Institute, 2014).

### 5.2.4 Follow through

The last step of the MGA is called ‘follow through’. In order to make sure an agreement gets implemented effectively, it is important that participants think about potential obstacles to effective implementation and draft it in such a way that it becomes ‘nearly self-enforcing’ (Susskind & Cruikshank, 2006). In the words of Susskind and Cruikshank, “the package should be structured in such a way that all the constituent groups would rather see it succeed than fail. They don’t need some superior authority rapping their knuckles to make them keep their promises. They are all pulling in the same direction, because they know that’s where their own best interests lie” (2006, p. 133). To make sure that an agreement does not crumble under unexpected circumstances, it should include mechanisms to deal with ‘predictable surprises’

(Consensus Building Institute, 2014). Finally, the MGA recommends including agreements on monitoring activities in the implementation stage and to continue working on successful relationships between the stakeholders (Consensus Building Institute, 2014).

### 5.2.5 For what situations are mutual gains negotiations appropriate?

The MGA has been applied to a high variety of complex issues and has proven successful in many cases (for example Gryzbowski et al., 2009, Rodríguez-Carvajal et al., 2010). It was once used to resolve human-elephant conflict in Kenya (Moss et al., 2011), but no other examples of mutual gains negotiations regarding human-wildlife or farmer-nature related issues were found. However, just like any negotiation strategy, it is not appropriate for every situation. Table 1 summarises some conditions for the MGA to be appropriate.

**Table 1**

*For what situations is the MGA appropriate?*

Conditions to mutual gains negotiations	When the MGA is not appropriate
- Stakeholders do not have strong BATNA's	- Stakeholders have strong BATNA's
- No clear definition and solution to problem	- Clear definition and solution to problem
- Shared understanding of the problem and related facts	- No shared understanding of the problem and related facts
- (Perceived) conflict of interests	- No (perceived) conflict of interests
- No strict timeline	- The problem requires a quick resolution

First of all, in order for a mutual gains negotiation to be appropriate, there should be a shared perception that something should change. If a few or many of the stakeholders are benefitting from the status quo, or their BATNA's are very good, there is little chance that they would be willing to engage in a mutual gains negotiation with others (Susskind et al., 1999). Secondly, there should not be a clear definition and solution to a problem. In such an instance, it would not make sense to set up negotiations according to MGA principles (Susskind et al., 1999). Relatedly, the MGA is not very suitable for problems that require quick resolutions. The strategy is quite elaborate and working under much time pressure would decrease the chances of reaching a satisfactory agreement for all stakeholders (Susskind et al., 1999). Lastly, the MGA requires a shared understanding of the problem and facts relating to this problem. In case stakeholders cannot agree on what the issue entails, the negotiations might not be successful (Susskind et al., 1999). In the case of the wolf in the Netherlands, for example, some parties might view the issue as an intrinsically economic one, in the sense of economic survival of livestock farmers, while others view it only through the lens of biodiversity or endangered species survival.

Interest-based negotiation is suitable for dealing with (perceived) conflicts of interests, meaning that parties' substantive, procedural or psychological interests are in perceived or actual competition (Moore, 2014). To illustrate what the types of interests entail, consider a sheep

farmer in the Netherlands. A substantive interest of his might be to generate sufficient income from his company without sacrificing all his free time. A procedural interest might be to be treated fairly by other parties, for instance concerning the price of his products or the regulations regarding his business operations. His psychological interests refer to how he wants to feel and be treated, he might for example desire a feeling of importance by contributing to Dutch agriculture. This study will analyse to what extent there is a conflict in interests between stakeholders regarding the wolf in the Netherlands, and thus whether there is opportunity for consensus building between them.

### **5.3 Animal stakeholders in a political process**

After discussing the involvement of different stakeholders in the literature review, one stakeholder has been left undiscussed. This particular consensus building project revolves around the fate of animals, namely wolves in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is a relevant consideration whether and how the wolf should be involved in such a process.

The past decades have seen a so-called ‘animal turn’ in many academic disciplines (Blattner et al., 2020), with increased attention being paid to the fact that animals generally do not get to influence (political) decisions which impact their lives (Milligan, 2015). In the words of Sue Donaldson, “some theorists have advocated for political representation of animals by human advocates or trustees who speak on behalf of animals in legislative, deliberative or regulatory bodies” (2020, p. 709). Take the animal rights political theorist Alisdair Cochrane, for instance, who argues that the interests of animals (specifically animal workers in his essay) should be represented by humans in political processes, for they lack the capabilities to engage in political discussion (Cochrane, 2016). Similar claims are made by Garner (2016), who states that animals should be represented by designated humans in political processes. He is also of the opinion that true participation in democracy, in the sense that animals co-author their shared futures with humans (as proposed by Donaldson, 2020), is unnecessary or unattainable. Instead of writing theory which advocates for “ideal political and moral principles”, he finds that “our political prescriptions must also be judged in relation to their feasibility: that is, how much they are practically possible of achieving at any point” (Cochrane et al., 2018). In his view, strategies which are not pragmatic will not be realised and are thus useless, rather our efforts ought to focus on improving the lives of animals in the here and now.

Speaking for, i.e. on behalf of, animals in decision-making processes might be seen as a moral duty for humans, who are the privileged party compared to animals in the process (Alcoff, 1991). In the case of the wolf, agreements on for example habitats, no-wolf zones, protection of livestock and especially lethal management affect the lives of individual wolves, but also the species as a whole. Therefore, the wolf can be seen as a stakeholder, if not the one with the highest stakes in the negotiation process. Its interests should thus be represented in the negotiations.

Donaldson would argue that any form of wardship of animals in political processes would not do the animal justice, despite the fact that indirect representation is inevitable, as animals are dependent on human trustees to interpret their participation in political processes (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2016). She argues that in order to represent an animals interests well, we would require an accurate understanding of their interests. However, acquiring this knowledge will never be possible in a situation where human trustees advocate for animals. Attempting to understand an animal's interests without its direct participation in democracy, in her view, constitutes epistemic failure. She writes the following about domesticated animals:

Our knowledge of [domesticated animals], their needs, interests, or potential ways of flourishing - is deeply impoverished by bias, self-interest and failure to recognize how their ways of being are profoundly shaped by the ways we stunt their opportunities. [...] Better knowledge requires creating opportunities for [domesticated animals], as individuals, to explore options and to express preferences about different possible lives and social arrangements. [...] Recent work on epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) suggests that the powerful are inevitably biased in their assessment of the capacities and interests of those denied political voice, a bias which cannot be overcome simply by mandating that the powerful become more knowledgeable or explicit in their reasoning and justification for decisions. (Donaldson, 2020, p. 718)

A scholar that would agree with Donaldson on this topic is Eva Meijer. She argues that, as humans, we consistently deny other animals agency and fail to recognise their potential to be agents of their own futures (2017). Indeed, when representing an animal in a political process, “humans have their own human perspectives, shaped by centuries of oppression of animals, from which they act” (Meijer, 2017, p. 143). If one defines agency as “the capacity to affect the environment and history” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 415), then it is hard to deny this as an attribute of animals. Meijer argues that we should recognise animal sovereignty, and take seriously their ways of communicating with us, for instance through different forms of language and their ways of resisting human intervention (Meijer, 2017). Similarly to Donaldson, she advocates for providing animals with more political agency by providing them with a range of opportunities for self-realisation.

Non-human animals are capable of living different types of lives and there are many aspects of life that they can determine individually with regard to work, play, food, companionship and various types of social relations. They do not depend on species-specific templates in the choices they make. Like humans, individual non-human animals are in the best epistemic position to recognise dimensions of their own flourishing, depending on their capacities, personalities and identities. (Meijer, 2017, p. 209)

Both Donaldson and Meijer argue for the recognition of animals as political actors. Meijer provides examples of animals engaging in political processes amongst themselves to substantiate this point (Meijer, 2017). Donaldson argues that the sheer presence, or visibility, of animals makes them an ‘agent of change’ by contributing to increased consideration of them in political deliberation (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011). As an example to this phenomenon she describes how the presence of dogs in public spaces normalises their participation in society and so challenges laws that restrict their freedom of movement, for instance through leashing or restricting access to certain spaces. Despite a lack of deliberation by the animals to instigate such a change, they do participate in the political process (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011).

Of course, within the scope of the project under study, assessing the opportunities for a societal dialogue on the wolf, it will not be possible to grant the wolf itself full agency over the outcomes of the project. Donaldson acknowledges that indirect representation will unavoidably have to take place and can contribute to providing animals with more political agency, if done in such a way that the representative truly attempts to ‘listen’ to the preferences of the represented (Donaldson, 2020). Similarly, Armstrong argues that we should prevent speaking for animals, while also making sure not to claim that any form of understanding of their own desires is impossible. In his words, we should learn “to listen to the voices of all kinds of ‘other’ without either ventriloquizing them or assigning to them accents so foreign that they can never be understood” (Armstrong, 2002).

The interests of the wolf should thus be safeguarded by other stakeholders to the best of their capabilities. Whether human representation of the wolf in this process will sufficiently guard and protect its interests will be reflected upon in the discussion (section 7).

#### **5.4 Research philosophy**

The project under study consists of the assessment stage of a consensus building process. The method for the ‘actual’ consensus building is the MGA. The MGA can be understood to rest on a social constructivist philosophy. This perspective sees knowledge as a result of social interaction, thus it has a constructionist or subjectivist epistemology (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It also sees knowledge as being tied into a socio-cultural context (Gergen, 1995). Therefore, multiple realities are possible according to this philosophy; it has a relativist ontology (Moon & Blackman, 2014). In answering research questions 1 to 4, I will stay close to the theory of the project and look through a constructivist lens also. Because these questions were based on theory of consensus building, which relies on a constructivist philosophy, it would not make sense to answer those same questions using a different philosophical approach.

In my personal reflections on the role of the wolf in this project (research question 4a), I will look through a critical theory lens. Critical theory is a wide philosophy, which includes multiple different streams (i.e. feminism, critical race theory, queer theory), but a general tendency in this philosophy is to critically reflect on, and challenge, power structures (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It differs from many other research philosophies in that it often intends to

change something as well, besides simply explaining a phenomenon (Moon & Blackman, 2014). One sub-stream of critical theory, and the one that is relevant to this thesis, is critical animal studies (Nibert, 2017). Critical animal studies reflects ethically on relations between humans and other animals, aiming to “dismantle all systems of domination and oppression” (The Institute for Critical Animal Studies [ICAS], 2016). It would argue that the separation between ‘the animal’ and ‘the human’ is a result of colonialist thinking and hegemonic anthropocentrism which separates ‘the natural’ from ‘the cultural’ (Armstrong, 2002). Critical theory, and in extension critical animal studies, have a similar epistemology and ontology as social constructivism (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Here too, there is a possibility of more than one reality and there is no such thing as objective meaning, which would exist independent of the observer. I should note here that while critical animal studies has an activist character as well, for this thesis my aim remains analytical. I do not aim to contribute to the dismantling of oppressive systems with this project, thus in that sense, I depart slightly from the research philosophy that underlies this work.

## **5.5 Operationalisations**

For the sake of clarity, some core concepts to this study should be defined. The project under study is based on the principle of *consensus seeking*.

*Consensus* can be defined as “agreement among all participating stakeholders” (Susskind et al., 1999, p. 327). *Consensus seeking* or *consensus building* is the effort to meet the interests of all stakeholders and come to unanimous agreement (Susskind et al., 1999). A *stakeholder* can be seen as “any individual, group [or] institution who could potentially be affected, whether positively or negatively, by a specified event, process or change” (Gass et al., 1997, p. 122). This definition makes it apparent that the wolf itself is a stakeholder in this discussion, since agreements will definitely affect its life and wellbeing. Morphy (n.d.) also includes those who can affect things in his definition of stakeholder, rather than only those who are affected by certain happenings. Many definitions of stakeholders, including the ones just given can theoretically be argued to include almost everyone. From a practical angle a stakeholder is not just defined by having a stake in an issue, but also one whose stake is recognised by the practitioner in charge of stakeholder identification (Colvin et al., 2016). For this thesis, the definitions of Gass and colleagues (1997) and Murphy (n.d.) were used. In the findings section (7), stakeholders include only those organisations which were included in the project.

Importantly, a stakeholder is not the same as a *participant*. The latter is an individual who participates in the consensus seeking process on behalf of others who share his or her interests (Susskind et al., 1999). To illustrate, this might be the managing director of an organisation, representing the interests of the members of his or her organisation. It could be the case that single participants represent multiple stakeholders, in case all these stakeholders feel adequately represented by that person. In this specific consensus seeking project, there will be no participants who are solely representing their personal interests, but only *representative*

*participation*, meaning people who speak on behalf of a larger group of people. Representative participation can take place in different ways. One option is to work with trustee representation, in which a representative is appointed and then trusted to act autonomously, without further participation of the represented (Coleman, 2005). Another option is to use delegate representation, in which the representative is expected to stay in contact with those he or she represents, making sure to communicate their interests as best as possible and avoiding personal convictions in the political processes they are a part of (Coleman, 2005). Moreover, a distinction can be made between direct and indirect representation. In direct representation, the representative is part of the group he or she represents. For example, a disabled person might advocate for others with disabilities. In indirect representation, one advocates for the rights of individuals who are not part of the same group as them. This is the case when humans advocates for animals (Donaldson, 2020). Such indirect representation is by definition trustee representation and is sometimes also called the wardship model. In consensus seeking processes, the aim is for participants to represent the interests of their following in a direct manner, keeping in contact with them about the process and what exactly they would like to get out of it.

The core of the process of consensus seeking boils down to the distinction between positions and interests. A *position* can be understood as an opinion, or something one wants to achieve (Friedman, 1993). In the context of the wolf debate, this might be “it should be possible to lethally manage wolves”. An *interest* can be understood as the underlying reason why one has a certain position (Friedman, 1993). Sticking to the same example, this person’s interest might be “I want to prevent harm to my sheep”.

The current study is focused on the first step of a consensus seeking process, which precedes the mutual gains negotiations. This step is called a *conflict assessment*, also known as a *situation assessment* or *stakeholder assessment* (Consensus Building Institute, n.d.; Fisher et al., 1991; Susskind et al., 1999). This assessment “enables the assessor [...] to identify the relevant stakeholders, map their substantive interests, and begin to scope areas of agreement and disagreement among them. It also allows the assessor to explore the parties’ incentives and willingness to negotiate in good faith” (Susskind et al., 1999, p. 104).

The MGA can be understood as a method to build consensus. It is thus not part of all steps of consensus building, but only of the negotiation aspect of it. *Mutual gain* represents a solution which satisfies all parties, often by “trading” across issues which are of different importance to them, making sure that there is something to gain for all through the negotiation (Susskind et al., 1999).

## **6. Methodology**

### **6.1 Consensus seeking**

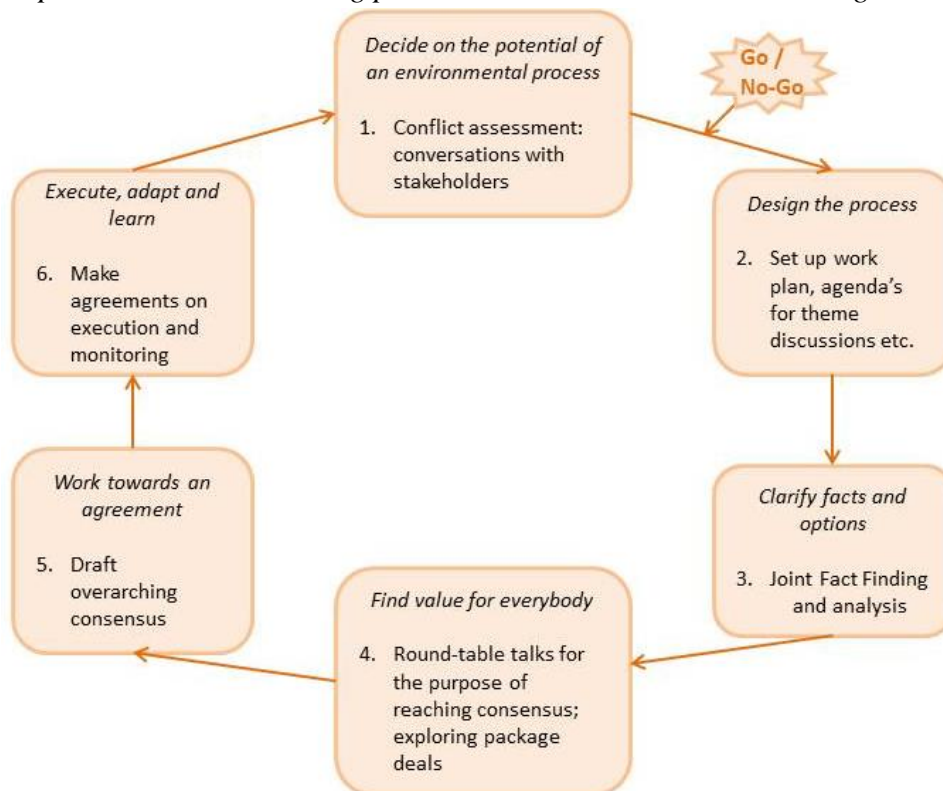
Consensus seeking processes consist of six steps. Only the last three steps constitute the negotiations, which occur according to MGA principles. Before these mutual gains negotiations

can actually take place, certain preparations need to be taken. First and foremost, a conflict assessment should be done. The project under study constitutes a conflict assessment, with the purpose of uncovering the relevant stakeholders, their positions and interests and evaluate the likelihood that they would be willing and able to come to consensus during later negotiations. Such an assessment can also be called a stakeholder assessment. Setting up mutual gains negotiations is time- and resource demanding for most (if not all) parties involved, thus it is important to gauge the feasibility of a successful negotiation beforehand and prevent time and money from going to waste. To conclude the assessment phase, a report is written in which recommendations are made about (dis)continuation of the process. Further benefits of a conflict assessment include the opportunity to educate participants about consensus seeking, building trust between participants and the assessor (who often will also facilitate the negotiations) and gather necessary information for drafting an action plan for the continuation of the consensus seeking process (Susskind et al., 1999). The assessment of this project includes all these aspects, but many are outside the scope of this study. Ideally, a neutral party is invited to execute the conflict assessment (Susskind et al., 1999), in case of this assessment, this so-called assessor is ‘Alcedo consultancy’.

As mentioned above, consensus seeking processes include six steps, as illustrated in Figure 3. Before the process is initiated, the necessity of starting a consensus seeking project is determined by the initiating organisations.

**Figure 3**

*Steps in a consensus seeking process. Based on Consensus Building Institute (n.d.).*



This thesis revolves around the first step, the conflict assessment. The assessment phase includes interviews with many stakeholders, in which they are asked to clarify their positions and especially their interests regarding the wolf in the Netherlands. Stakeholders are also asked if they view such a process as valuable and whether they would be willing to participate. This assessment phase allows for the assessor to be able to get a first idea of possibilities for consensus, based on the stakeholders' perceptions. After the interviews, the findings will be analysed and processed into a report that shows the possibilities for a consensus building process on the wolf in the Netherlands, including recommendations on how this might be organised and a substantiation of the conclusions explaining the scope of different interests among the stakeholders and their views regarding the wolf and potential dialogue about the wolf.

After the creation of this report, there will be a Go/No-Go moment. In case it is estimated that consensus can be reached and stakeholders are willing to participate in round-table talks, it will be a Go and preparations for the rest of the process can get started (from step 2 on). Step 3 includes the process of Joint Fact-Finding. Disputes often arise (partly) due to information gaps or differing interpretations of the same data (Susskind et al., 1999). This step ensures that negotiations can take place with a shared fact basis between participants. Joint Fact-Finding “extends the interest-based, cooperative efforts of parties engaged in consensus building into the realm of information gathering and scientific analysis. In joint fact-finding, stakeholders with differing viewpoints and interests work together to develop data and information, analyse facts and forecasts, develop common assumptions and informed opinion, and, finally, use the information they have developed to reach decisions together” (Susskind et al., 1999, p. 376). Step 4, 5 and 6 constitute the MGA, which was elaborated upon in the theoretical framework.

## **6.2 Research strategy**

This research is a qualitative study. To answer research question 2 (on the underlying interests of different stakeholders) and research question 3 (on the potential to reach consensus), data is gathered through 35 semi-structured interviews with the organisations that are deemed to be stakeholders regarding the wolf in the Netherlands. These interviews are held in the context of preparations for a societal dialogue about the wolf, the participants thus do not participate on the grounds of collecting data for this thesis, but rather for participating in the preparations for a potential societal dialogue on this topic. Notes were taken during the interviews, which were processed into systematic reports. These reports were used to analyse overlapping or contrasting interests of the different stakeholders. The interviews do all address the same questions, but the order in which they are asked, and whether for example clarification is asked for, can differ per interview.

In order to answer research question 4 (on the extent to which the wolf's interests would be represented in this potential societal dialogue), desk analysis was done. Both the interviews and desk analysis were used for research question 1 (on the main stakeholders). Both applied,

practical literature and academic literature on topics such as consensus seeking processes, stakeholder identification and political processes involving animals was reviewed.

Moreover, three meetings were held with experts in the context of the conflict assessment. Some insights from these conversations were also used in answering research question 3 and 4. The first expert was Martin Drenthen, a professor in environmental philosophy, who specialises in the relationship between humans and nature and focuses, amongst other topics, on the return of large mammals to the Netherlands. The second expert was Klaas Dijkstra, a marketer with much experience doing research on societal acceptance of certain topics. Recently, he studied how Dutch people feel about the return of the wolf to the Netherlands. The third and last expert that was consulted was Noelle Aarts, a professor of Socio-Ecological Interactions. Much of her work has revolved around dialogues in complex societal contexts, such as the domain of nature and land use.

### **6.3 Procedure / data collection**

#### **6.3.1 Literature research**

The literature used for this thesis was mostly found by looking for key terms on Google Scholar and on RUQuest. Some key works provided references to many other similar works and other authors in the field. Some relevant literature was provided by my academic supervisor and my internship supervisor.

#### **6.3.2 Selecting stakeholders and participants**

As explained in the theoretical framework, it is essential to a successful and legitimate consensus seeking process that everybody with a stake in the issue is represented in the negotiations. The conflict assessment provides an opportunity to identify and select stakeholders. This was done using multiple methods. Firstly, the initiators of the project proposed an initial list of stakeholders, based on their knowledge and experience of the debate about the wolf in the Netherlands. This strategy can be seen as ‘art’, as defined by Colvin and colleagues (2016). These parties were all contacted. The initial list was elaborated upon by the assessor, using insights from news and current events. This strategy involved both ‘creating’ through brainstorming possibilities and ‘seeking’ through analysing current news media (Colvin et al., 2016). Some parties were contacted to ask if they would be suitable (and willing) to represent a certain interest group, or if they knew of a better candidate. Importantly, the list of stakeholders was developed further with the help of the interviewees. During the interviews, the participants themselves were asked which stakeholder groups they saw relating to the wolf in the Netherlands and whether any parties should be added to the list of organisations to be interviewed (Susskind et al., 1999). Such snowballing also falls under ‘seeking’ (Colvin et al., 2016). Based on theory

of consensus building processes, each organisation that was mentioned by at least two stakeholders was contacted (Susskind et al., 1999).

Many organisations were selected using existing platforms, namely Wolven in Nederland and Landelijk Overleg Wolf. Moreover, organisations were added which are not already part of the previously mentioned platforms, but are still deemed to have an interest in the developments around the wolf. Examples include representation for the recreational and tourism sector (e.g. mountain bikers, hikers, hospitality), representation for keepers of animals which are not sheep (e.g. equestrians, keepers of poultry), an organisation for supervisors of nature and groups who take a very strong stance in the discussion. As mentioned previously, it is practically impossible to involve the silent majority in this project. Only organised people could be involved as a stakeholder. Therefore, all participants of the project are organisations who represent a larger following of people with similar interests.

In total, 45 parties were invited to participate in the assessment. Of these parties, 35 agreed to participate in some form. Most of these parties were interviewed, a few provided us with their main insights regarding the wolf through telephone or by supplying a text document. For privacy reasons, I will not report which parties did not consent to participate and why they chose not to be involved. The initial list of invitations consisted of 28 organisations, meaning another 17 were added after further insights or by recommendation of participants. See Appendix I for a list and short description of the organisations that participated in the assessment.

### 6.3.3 Preparatory analysis

In order to prepare for the interviews, a factsheet will be created for each stakeholder, outlining some details of the organisation, including its main purpose, any known positions regarding the wolf-debate and whether it is already involved in dialogue about the wolf. This allows the interviewer to get familiar with the different players within the debate, and (some of) their positions and interests prior to the actual data collection.

Moreover, a small analysis was done of large news and media outlets in the Netherlands, in order to identify themes that are often discussed relating to the wolf, and which parties are involved with or concerned about those themes. Doing a preparatory analysis of news items and creating a preliminary overview of themes that seem to be of importance to the different stakeholders allows the assessor to get familiar with current events within the debate and create an idea of what is important to the different stakeholders.

Importantly, this preliminary analysis does not constitute the actual analysis and is merely meant to provide some understanding of the debate as is publicly happening. If a seemingly important theme that was attributed to a stakeholder is not addressed during an interview, clarification might be asked for per mail whether this is indeed an important theme for the organisation, but in general the assessment only relies on the information gathered in the interviews.

#### 6.3.4 Primary data collection

As mentioned previously, data was sourced from semi-structured interviews with organisations which are seen as stakeholders relating to the wolf. Participants of the interview agreed to interviews regarding an assessment to uncover the necessity and potential of a societal dialogue regarding the wolf. They did not come to the interview expecting to be interviewed solely for this thesis, but they did consent to my usage of the findings that were approved by them in the interview reports.

For the interviews, a list of questions was drafted in collaboration with the assessor of the project. Because the interviews are part of a larger assessment (which answers more questions than I do in this study), not all questions were relevant to me. For an overview of questions asked, see Appendix II.

The interviews were not fully transcribed, but rather immediately processed into an overview which showcased the answers in a structured way. After creating this report, the second interviewer made adjustments to it and then it was sent to the participant. The participant was then asked to review the report and check that everything was understood correctly. They were encouraged to make changes were required, or add or delete anything they did or did not want used in the analysis. When this adjusted version was sent back, the report was made final. For the template of such an interview report, see Appendix III.

#### **6.4 Ethics**

No names are recorded for this thesis, only participating organisations were mentioned. Interviews were not recorded, nor fully transcribed. Instead, notes were taken during the interview and processed into interview reports, to be confirmed by the interviewee. Only information from these reports was used, because this was verbally consented to be used for this thesis. Findings are anonymised to an extent in the results, in the sense that organisations are not directly linked to quotes or findings, but general directions are given (i.e. “a terrain-managing organisation said...”). Direct quotes stem only from the approved interview reports. Furthermore, there is no use of deception or harm done to participants.

#### **6.5 Data analysis**

After interview reports were finalised, they were uploaded into the coding software Atlas.ti. Using Atlas.ti, pieces of text were coded and grouped together, in order to create overviews of data that are relevant for a certain question. For example, a list of all organisations' main interests was created, and one that showed the stakeholders' attitudes towards a societal dialogue about the future of the wolf. Data was grouped into usable results (e.g. grouping interests together that overlap sufficiently to be seen as the same) using Atlas.ti, but also partly in Microsoft Word and on paper.

## **6.6 Validity and reliability of the research**

I expect the findings of the interviews to have high validity. Each of the invited participants represent an organisation or sector. The directors and chairs of organisations will be invited. If these people are not available or willing to do an interview, they generally direct us to the person who is most involved with wolf-related matters in their organisation. For this reason, the interviewees are likely aware of the position of the people or sector they represent and are able to articulate this clearly. Therefore, findings from the interviews can be expected to reflect the ‘true’ standpoints of the organisations well. Of course, findings might differ if different people were present at the interviews to represent their organisation, but this is hard to prevent and likely would not make any meaningful difference.

Care will be taken to speak to as many stakeholders as needed so that the different interests that may be relevant to the wolf in the Netherlands are all represented, while making sure that certain sectors are not very over- or under-represented in the list of participants. The latter is actually not very relevant, since consensus seeking processes are not based on voting.

Regarding reliability, care will be taken to not have the interviews be influenced by the researchers personal convictions. Questions will be drafted based on topics that are raised by the participating organisations and in the media and academics more generally. All interview data will be immediately processed into a report. The assessor of the conflict assessment will also read all the interview reports, and check that it is an accurate reflection of the conversation. Moreover, all participants are asked to review my interpretation of their answers. In this way, there is a double check if there was proper understanding during the interviews.

## **7. Findings and discussion**

The following section will present the findings from this study and provide a reflection on them. Much of the collected data is relevant for multiple research questions, but in order to prevent repetition, most findings are described under one research question only.

### **7.1 R.Q. 1: Who are the main stakeholders?**

As described in the literature review, it is important to invite the right stakeholders to the table in order to improve the chances of a successful consensus seeking process. Table 2 shows how many stakeholders participated, sorted under seven categories.

**Table 2**

*Participating stakeholders from different categories*

Category	N
Agricultural sector and other animal keepers	8
Terrain managing organisations and landowners	6
Nature and animal conservationists	4

**Table 2.** *Participating stakeholders from different categories (continued)*

Category	N
Nature management and fauna management	3
Land users: recreational sector and tourism	7
Government agencies and representatives	4
Other	3
Total	35

It seems that these parties together create a good reflection of the stakeholders surrounding this topic. Firstly, the methods to identify stakeholders were varied and thorough enough that it would be unlikely for an important party to be overlooked. Secondly, after a while no new organisations were mentioned anymore by stakeholders, giving off the impression that the field of stakes was adequately covered. Thirdly, nearly all parties from the Landelijk Overleg Wolf participated in this assessment. Currently, the Landelijk Overleg Wolf is the broadest coalition of stakeholders that has some influence over wolf-related policy. This means that if negotiations were to take place, and all these parties also end up participating in them, the chances are low that the outcome would be rejected by a party who feels that they ought to have been included. Lastly, organisations from all potential stakeholder groups as identified by Trouwborst (2010) participated in the assessment.

Of course, there is some power disparity between the stakeholders in the assessment. Only the governmental agencies (especially those at the provincial level) are responsible for governance relating to the wolf in the Netherlands. Many other stakeholders are involved in the Landelijk Overleg Wolf, which is the structure that is used to inform the provinces on the Interprovincial Plans regarding the wolf. When engaging in a consensus building process, all participants should be working as equals. This should not be a problem, if all participating parties consent to the conditions of a mutual gains negotiation prior to starting the dialogue.

Moreover, the wolf itself cannot contribute to any dialogue as a participant in the same way that humans can. Section 7.5 will reflect on the extent to which the wolf's interests might be represented at the table by the selection of stakeholders that was identified in the assessment.

## **7.2 R.Q. 2: What are the interests of different stakeholders regarding the wolf in the Netherlands?**

As was to be expected, a wide range of positions regarding the wolf were shared by the different stakeholders. Not all positions will be discussed, since these are actually not as important as the interests in order to discover the potential to reaching agreement. A fairly 'light' example of something that there are different views on is the extent to which knowledge about the wolf and its impacts on its surroundings from other countries is applicable in the Netherlands. One terrain managing organisation states "much knowledge on the wolf from abroad is used, which is hard to translate to the densely populated country of the Netherlands". Another terrain-managing organisation says "research from countries that have more experience with the wolf should be used more".

A supposedly more difficult disagreement to solve is the way in which we ought to deal with the return of the wolf in the Netherlands. Whereas one party calls for a "zero option", in other words, not a single wolf in the country, others claim we must leave the wolves alone and give them space. Moreover, parties seem to think differently on the impact the wolf has on nature or

ecosystems. Whereas, according to many nature and animal conservationists “the wolf has an important function within nature” and “it contributes to a complete ecosystem”, other parties fear for the way it threatens different animal and plant species: “Focusing on one species can be very damaging to biodiversity; many other (also protected) species can suffer from this”. Lastly, a difficult debate revolves around the protected status of the wolf. Of course, this is not something that can be resolved through a consensus seeking process in the Netherlands, as this is organised at the European level, but it illustrates another clear contestation. Many parties voiced the opinion that the wolves’ protected status should be scaled down, as this strict protection provides little possibility for wolf management, which is problematic, or will become so in the future. Many other parties voiced their concern over this thought and stated that this protected status should stay intact.

Seemingly, these parties could never come to an agreement that would satisfy them all, as their positions are so far apart. However, a different picture emerges when looking at the interests that underlie these positions. In total, 12 ‘umbrella interests’ were distinguished that represent multiple sub-interests. Table 3 provides an overview of all wolf-related interests of stakeholders and how many times they occur in each stakeholder category. Table 4 gives a ranking of the interests mentioned by most stakeholders and stakeholder categories.

**Table 3**  
*Overview of stakeholders’ interests regarding the wolf*

	Stakeholder type (n)						
	Agriculture + Animal Keepers (8)	TMOs + Landowners (6)	Nature and Animal Conservationists (4)	Nature + Fauna Management (3)	Recreational Sector + Tourism (7)	Governments + Agencies + Representatives (4)	Other (3)
Generation of trustworthy and transparent facts regarding the wolf.	1	6	2	3	3	2	2
Aim for peaceful coexistence between people and wolves, prevention of conflicts.	3	1	3	3		3	2
Ensuring perspective for the future of the sector / enterprises; being able to maintain good business operations.	5	2		1	3	3	1
Stimulate complete and naturally functioning nature and its ecosystems.	1	4	4				

**Table 3.** *Overview of stakeholders' interests regarding the wolf (continued)*

	Stakeholder type (n)						
	Agriculture + Animal Keepers (8)	TMOs + Landowners (6)	Nature and Animal Conservationists (4)	Nature + Fauna Management (3)	Recreational Sector + Tourism (7)	Government Agencies + Representatives (4)	Other (3)
Aim for maximal animal welfare of kept (farm) animals and animals living in the wild.	4				3		1
Countering polarisation around the wolf; less black and white thinking.	3	1	1	1			2
Clear and appropriate regulations regarding the wolf and good execution of these regulations.	1	2		1	1	1	1
Increasing societal support of the wolf.		3	2	1		1	
Maintenance and recovery of (vulnerable) ecology and biodiversity.	1			3			
Preservation of recreational access to areas where wolves are settling.					3		
Maintenance and recovery of (vulnerable) ecology and biodiversity.		2					1
Acknowledging the intrinsic value of the wolf			1				

**Table 4***Overview of stakeholders' interests regarding the wolf, ranked by occurrence*

Wolf-related interests	Organisations with interest (n)	Stakeholder groups with interest (n)
Generation of trustworthy and transparent facts regarding the wolf.	19	7
Aim for peaceful coexistence between people and wolves, prevention of conflicts.	15	6
Ensuring perspective for the future of the sector / enterprises; being able to maintain good business operations.	15	6

**Table 4.** *Overview of stakeholders' interests regarding the wolf, ranked by occurrence (continued)*

Wolf-related interests	Organisations with interest (n)	Stakeholder groups with interest (n)
Stimulate complete and naturally functioning nature and its ecosystems.	9	3
Countering polarisation around the wolf; less black and white thinking.	8	5
Protecting the wolf, conform to its legal status.	8	4
Aim for maximal animal welfare of kept (farm) animals and animals living in the wild.	8	4
Clear and appropriate regulations regarding the wolf and good execution of these regulations.	7	6
Increasing societal support of the wolf.	7	4
Maintenance and recovery of (vulnerable) ecology and biodiversity.	4	2
Maintenance and recovery of (vulnerable) ecology and biodiversity.	3	2
Preservation of recreational access to areas where wolves are settling.	3	1
Acknowledging the intrinsic value of the wolf	1	1

Organising all interests into a table like this, shows there is much overlap in interests between the different stakeholders. For example, interests regarding economic security, the negative or positive impact of wolves on business operations, prevention and compensation of damage to farm animals and preventing that the return of the wolf puts a sector in a bad light were all categorised under “ensuring perspective for the future of the sector / enterprises; being able to maintain good business operations”. Many parties from the different categories described one or multiple of these interests, which all have to do with ensuring perspective for a certain sector, profession or activity.

There was only one interest that did not fit into a larger category, which was the interest in strengthening international cooperation. There was only one stakeholder who mentioned this interest. Out of 12 main interests, only 2 were mentioned in only one category of stakeholders: recreational access of areas where the wolf has settled and recognition of the intrinsic value of the wolf.

### **7.3 R.Q. 3: To what extent is there a potential to reach a consensus?**

To reflect on whether there would be potential to reach consensus on governance relating to the return of the wolf is considering whether a consensus building process might be successful (i.e. end up in agreement between all stakeholders). In order for parties to be able to come to agreement, the debate should not be too polarised. According to Noelle Aarts, polarisation is not the same as a disagreement in opinions (personal communication, June 23, 2022). Instead, you can speak of polarisation when the discussion starts to revolve around dichotomies: the wolf

belongs here or it does not; nature can keep itself balanced or we need to manage it, for example (Van Herzele & Aarts, 2019). In a polarised situation, the discussion takes place between the ‘extremes’, the nuanced middle ground is overlooked and the parties at the far ends of the discussion start making accusations of each other. In her opinion, the discussion about the wolf is on its way to a polarised situation (Aarts, personal communication, June 23, 2022).

Indeed, the emotions that surround this topic were highlighted by different stakeholders. For example, multiple organisations from the agricultural sector and other animal keepers point out that there is much fear amongst keepers of animals that their animals will get hurt by the wolf. To quote one: “for our members there is much emotion bound to the idea that someone would hurt their [animals]”. Another says “this topic is emotionally charged. The damage that the wolf is doing should not be downplayed, then you surpass the sheep farmers’ interests”. Parties from other categories, such as the recreational sector and government agencies and representatives also note that the wolf evokes a lot of emotion on all sides of the discussion. The notion that the debate is already polarising, or has polarised, was expressed explicitly by stakeholders from every category, except for the recreational sector. This is not surprising, as most parties from this sector were not actively involved with the wolf yet, in contrast to most parties from the other categories. However, even stakeholders from the recreational sector stated that they noticed a tendency for black and white thinking regarding this topic, meaning there is little nuance in the information that is provided about the wolf in the media or by other stakeholders. Moreover, there seems to be some wariness or unease towards the way other parties participate in the discussion amongst many of the stakeholders. Both those who are concerned about the return of the wolf and those who welcome its return seem to suspect that the ‘other side’ is basing their stance on incomplete information or wrong ideas, that they misuse information to benefit their own goals and that they could be more respectful in their approach. All of this information gives the impression that it would be quite challenging for all of these stakeholders to reach consensus on how to deal with the wolf in the Netherlands.

A reason why consensus building might still be successful is that despite the differences between stakeholders and scepticism towards others, nearly every single party is willing to look for ways to prevent conflict together with other stakeholders. When asked how conflict could be prevented, 15 stakeholders said that having a conversation would be necessary. Out of 35 interviewed parties, 32 indicated they are willing to work with other stakeholders to find mutually beneficial solutions. Of the three who did not give an immediate yes, one has decided to stop their activities relating to the wolf, hence they would not actively engage with other stakeholders on the wolf anymore. The other two parties indicate certain conditions under which they would work together with other stakeholders on finding mutually beneficial solutions. One set the condition that the facts should be clear beforehand and the other that the protected status of the wolf would not be questioned. These parties were also hesitant to commit to working together with any other party.

Furthermore, to uncover whether MGA negotiations could lead to consensus, the interests underlying (contrasting) positions should be analysed. Looking at the interests of the different

stakeholders (as presented in section 7.2), it seems that there is overlap in what the different stakeholders are looking to achieve. An example of this is the difference in opinion on the protected status of the wolf. Some parties argue that this should be adapted to a more mild protection, in order for management of the wolf to be possible. Other parties are firm in their beliefs that this should not happen. Such a difference in positions is seemingly impossible to reconcile.

However, looking at the reason why these parties take such different stances, it seems that their goals are not so different after all. Those who are in favour of more regulation of the wolf are often afraid that the wolf will negatively impact other animal and plant species in the Netherlands. They argue that most, if not all, ‘natural’ areas in the country host a plethora of protected animal and plant species, which can thrive there due to the way these areas are managed. If the wolf were to kill the grazing animals which keep the areas open, the resulting change in the landscape will lead to a decrease in the amount of species that can live in our country, or a decreasing biodiversity. On the other hand, most organisations who aim to safeguard the wolf’s protected status want to do so because they see the wolf as an important part of biodiversity and as a species that positively contributes to a complete ecosystem. This shows that stakeholders who are seemingly opposed in their goals, all aim to protect nature and biodiversity, although the way they see best to achieve this is different. The difference is thus not based on a difference in interests, but on a difference in perception of how the wolf will impact the ecosystems in which it functions. Such overlap provides an opportunity to work together on a common problem, namely biodiversity loss, and allows for stakeholders to work on solutions that satisfy all parties.

In this specific example, it would be necessary to go through a phase of Joint Fact-Finding first, in order to get on the same page regarding the impact of the wolf on biodiversity, but this is a required step in any consensus seeking process, hence not an issue. Importantly, close examination of the interests that underlie the positions of all stakeholders regarding the wolf in the Netherlands finds none that are diametrically opposed, or which cannot exist at the same time. This is a promising finding, creating much more potential to reach consensus than when two or multiple interests would have been in clear conflict.

All in all, even though reaching a widely supported consensus on the future of the wolf in the Netherlands would seem to be difficult, considering growing polarisation amongst some of the stakeholders, there are also reasons to believe that this would still be possible. First of all, interests of the stakeholders are not diametrically opposed, meaning it would theoretically be possible to satisfy everybody’s interests. Secondly, there is much overlap in interests between stakeholders and stakeholder categories. Thirdly, and not unimportantly, almost every stakeholder is willing to work together to find mutually satisfactory solutions to the issues at hand. This is surprising, considering the fact that tensions already seem to be rising in the discussion surrounding the wolf and there is some wariness amongst stakeholders regarding each other. Nevertheless, this makes the chances of success at coming to an agreement much higher.

**7.4 R.Q. 4: What are the opportunities and challenges of using a Mutual Gains Approach to structure the debate?**

Some opportunities and challenges of using the MGA for negotiations about governance relating to the wolf in the Netherlands were identified. An overview is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Opportunities and Challenges of using MGA*

Opportunities for using MGA	Challenges for using MGA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MGA deemed appropriate for the situation</li> <li>- Stakeholders seem willing to address other’s issues</li> <li>- Third of stakeholders said to prefer non-positional negotiation</li> <li>- Higher chance of implementation of agreement due to governmental participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some stakeholders thinking in line with positional negotiation</li> <li>- No shared understanding of the problem</li> </ul>

In case negotiations were to take place about the future of the wolf in the Netherlands, it is important to consider whether the MGA would likely be a good approach for these negotiations to follow. In Table 1 (section 5.2.5) five conditions were presented for the MGA to be appropriate in a certain situation. All of these conditions would be met in case the assessment were to lead to negotiations about governance relating to the return of the wolf to the Netherlands. The first condition states that stakeholders should not have strong BATNA’s. In other words, there must be a shared perception that something should change (Susskind et al., 1999). Those stakeholders who feel that nothing should change, or it would be beneficial to them to not negotiate (they have a good BATNA) would likely not be willing to join a consensus building process. This was clearly reflected in the interviews of the conflict assessment. As mentioned in section 7.3, almost every stakeholder indicated they would be willing to work with others to find mutually beneficial solutions. These are the same parties who also indicated they would like to be involved in further negotiations, or at least would be so under certain conditions. The only parties who said they would (definitely) not participate in further negotiations were one that is stopping their active involvement with the wolf in the Netherlands and a one that did not wish to participate in negotiations that might potentially harm the strict protection of the wolf. Considering that the protected status of the wolf aids their interests, a situation with no agreement is better for them than any agreement which would change this situation. Regardless, out of 35 interviewed organisations, only two indicated they would not participate in further talks, showing that there is still broad support for the idea that it would be beneficial to meet with stakeholders for dialogue.

Secondly, according to literature on consensus building, a mutual gains process is appropriate when there is no clear definition and solution to the problem (Susskind et al., 1999).

This condition applies to this case, with stakeholders focusing on different aspects of the problem and proposing different solutions.

The third condition for the MGA to be appropriate is that there is a shared understanding of the problem and related facts (Susskind et al., 1999). This is currently not the case. For example, whereas some stakeholders highlighted that damage to livestock animals is a major concern of theirs, others found this to be of no real significance and pointed out that other animals are responsible for much more damage to livestock. Moreover, there was much disagreement on certain information, such as whether the presence of wolves has a positive or a negative impact on biodiversity in the area. Even though this condition is clearly not met at the time of the assessment, undertaking Joint Fact-Finding (which is a given in a consensus building process) will allow for this condition to be met before the start of negotiations, thus this is not problematic.

The fourth, and perhaps most important, condition for the MGA to be suitable is that there is a (perceived) conflict of interests. There is definitely a perceived clash of interests surrounding the return of the wolf to the Netherlands, which is reflected in the growing polarisation around the topic. It would be unnecessary to hold interest-based negotiations when there was no perceived competition between stakeholders' interests (Moore, 2014). However, this assessment has shown that the actual clash of interests is not as big as might be expected from the polarisation that is already taking place (see section 7.2 and 7.3).

Lastly, the MGA is most suitable when there is no strict timeline for when agreement needs to be reached, which is also the case. Thus, it can be concluded that the conditions for using the MGA are met, or will be met after the Joint Fact-Finding. It is thus an opportunity that this approach seems suitable for the topic at hand.

Using data from the interviews and insights from literature, it is possible to reflect further on potential opportunities and challenges of using the MGA. Multiple opportunities for applying the MGA to tackle how to shape the future of the wolf in the Netherlands were identified. First of all, a reason why negotiations often do not end with a satisfactory agreement to all parties is that people tend to think that it is not up to them to solve other's issues, leading to thinking of solutions that only satisfy one party (Fisher et al., 1991). Interestingly, parties from every category besides the recreational sector mentioned that conflict between wolves and farm animals was an important topic to address, despite the fact that this does not influence them all directly. This shows that many stakeholders are thinking about other's interests as well and would likely be willing to contribute to ways to satisfy them.

Secondly, about a third of the stakeholders brought up that they would prefer non-positional negotiation tactics. When answering the question "do you envision any ways to prevent conflict", but also during other parts of the interviews, many participants explicitly mentioned that the discussion ought to be about what it is that underlies one's position, what it is they are trying to achieve. In total, 10 stakeholders explicitly showed that they were hoping to revert the conversation away from positions. For example, one party from the category 'agriculture and other animal keepers' said the following:

The Netherlands is a patchwork of interests: anthropogenic cultural landscapes, cultural-historic nature and new nature according to rewilding principles. Support comes about by listening to and understanding each other's interests. If we do this well, the interests of one party do not have to be a threat to another, without the first being too restricted in their vision or business operations.

This quote shows a clear intention to take the conversation to another level and work on solutions that satisfy all parties. Another party from the same category mentioned the following:

Before the start of such conversations, it should be put on the agenda to speak about how willing people are to really speak to each other; also about the hidden emotions that underlie everybody's positions. If we do not address this, such a societal dialogue will only become an exchange of polarised positions.

The fact that 10 stakeholders brought up interests, or underlying emotions, or the goals that shape one's positions, shows that even without an explanation of the MGA, people seem positive about the idea to take the conversation away from positions, such as "we want all wolves to be left alone" or "we want no wolves to be admitted into certain areas". One other party did not mention a 'deeper layer', but did stress the importance of reaching consensus throughout their interview.

Thirdly, an advantage of mutual gains negotiations is that governmental agencies can take part as participants in them. Having stakeholders involved who are responsible for regulations increases the chances that any agreement will be implemented in regulation. Of course, it can be difficult for participants representing governmental agencies to commit a priori to the outcomes of a such a process. However, since no agreement will be reached if not all parties are satisfied with it, there is little chance that the outcomes of negotiations would lead to governmental agencies being expected to implement regulations that do not align with the law, for example. Moreover, participants can choose to commit to a phased implementation of the agreement or a conditional settlement, making sure that they do not overstep their role in their respective agencies.

Furthermore, any dialogue about sensitive or emotionally laden topics should be approached with care. Noelle Aarts, professor of socio-ecological interactions, points out in her work on communication about nature policy that often people enter conversations looking to convince the other party that their perspective is right (Aarts, 1998). Such an approach only makes it more likely that a conflict will escalate (M. Drenthen, personal communication, June 2, 2022). Indeed, as stated by a party from the category government agencies and representatives "[we see] that where parties are already talking about the wolf, decency is not increasing and people are not coming closer together. So how can we prevent this friction?". Aarts argues that in controversial topics, people tend to feel most comfortable speaking with like-minded others,

which leads to opinions turning into shared truths. She highlights the importance of bringing people together who do not share the same visions on nature (or any other topic, for that matter), as the idea that there is only one truth is often at the basis of conflict (Wageningen University & Research, 2005). She has drafted some conditions for successful dialogue. One such condition is that participants must be aware of, and acknowledge, their mutual dependence (Aarts, 1998). Another important condition is that instead of fighting about arguments and positions, people's interests, values, norms and goals should be made explicit before starting negotiations. The MGA also allows for this to be done better than other conventional negotiation methods.

All this information makes it tempting to conclude that there are only opportunities in using mutual gains negotiations to come to decisions on the future of the wolf in the Netherlands. However, there are also some reasons why this might not be the ideal strategy. Firstly, just as there were several parties who were already appearing to think in a way that is useful for consensus building processes (namely, at the level of interests), there were also multiple parties who showed to consider negotiations something that would always include some form of 'give and take'. For example, two parties from the category government agencies and representatives indicated that it would likely not be possible to keep everybody happy. One of them stated this is the case because people's positions were too far apart, which shows that they are used to positional negotiation. They continued, "the hope is that organisations are willing to accept something which isn't perfectly up their ally. After all, the outcomes of such a debate won't make everybody happy." Two parties from the category 'other' mentioned that it would be necessary to compromise in order to find solutions that everybody would be happy with. Furthermore, two parties (one fauna and wildlife management organisation and one from agriculture and other animal keepers) said they felt that there should be consensus about their proposed solutions. Such an approach is not productive in mutual gains negotiations. Furthermore, besides some parties clearly showing thinking in line with positional negotiation, one terrain managing organisation mentioned that it would be difficult to keep inviting more and more parties who also wish to participate in talks about the wolf, showing thinking in line with majority rule decision-making. When asked about who they consider to be a stakeholder of the topic, this organisation answered that groups of stakeholders (such as terrain owners) speak with one voice and that a pitfall of inviting individual organisations to participate in the discussion is that if this happens, more representatives of [another group of stakeholders] should be invited. In consensus building processes, this should not be a problem, as there is no voting taking place and all interests should be served in the final agreement. Of course, dialogue should stay manageable, thus it might be useful to use representatives who speak for multiple organisations with similar interests, and ideally there is a balanced attendance of participants.

Secondly, as explained previously, one of the conditions for using MGA is not met, namely a shared understanding of the problem and the facts relating to it (Susskind et al., 1999). Regarding the facts relating to the problem, this should not be problematic, considering a phase of Joint Fact-Finding would take place before the start of negotiations. However, different stakeholders also seem to have different views of the problem at hand, as can be seen in their

answers to the question which worries they have. Some worry about the economic effects the wolf will have on their business, others worry about the use of misinformation about the wolf, yet others worry about the safety of animals and people.

All things considered, many more opportunities were identified than challenges. Considering conditions from consensus building literature, the MGA does provide a suitable method to attack the question how to shape the future of the wolf in the Netherlands. As seen, there are some reasons why it might be difficult to build consensus about this topic, but these could be resolved when the process unfolds further. Firstly, it is not surprising that some stakeholders show clear signs of thinking about ‘dividing up a pie’ instead of enlarging it, since mutual gains negotiations are not the norm and MGA principles have not yet been explained to the stakeholders. Secondly, it seems that different stakeholders would define the problem at hand in a different way. However, most stakeholders would probably agree that the problem revolves around the question how the country can successfully be shared by both people and wolves, meaning there is minimal (economic, physical or psychological) damage or harm inflicted on other animals and people. Moreover, the Joint Fact Finding that is yet to take place would ensure that all parties are on the same page about the facts.

Of course, there are more factors that can make a negotiation successful or not. For example, the outcomes of a mutual gains negotiation are very dependent on the people who represent their interest category or organisation. This, however, is not specific to this approach and holds for any negotiation. The largest downside of using the MGA for dialogue about the wolf in the Netherlands, and also the one that is most difficult to overcome, is that there is no direct representation possible for the wolf. This will be discussed in more detail under the next research question.

#### **7.5 R.Q. 4a: Would the interests of the wolf be represented adequately in this process from a critical theory perspective?**

The negotiations that might follow from this conflict assessment are quite unique, in the sense that they deal with an interspecies issue. This raises the question: will all interests be adequately represented in the process? In the words of Martin Drenthen, “if the focus is only on human interests, non-human interests will lose out” (personal communication, June 2, 2022). Since wolves are not able to participate in negotiations, their interests should be indirectly represented by humans. A first question that comes up in this scenario, is whether it is possible to know the interests of a wolf. According to Sue Donaldson, attempting to uncover this through indirect representation constitutes epistemic failure. Similarly, Meijer points out that it is nearly impossible to rid oneself of perspectives shaped by a culture built on animal exploitation (2017). However, it seems an overstatement to conclude from this that it is impossible to understand any interests of an animal. Based on our understanding of biology and behavioural research, it feels safe to assume that all wolves want to live, have a territory with sufficient food available and be a part of a pack. The following section reflects on whether basic interests such as these would likely be safeguarded if negotiations take place.

First of all, as can be seen in the findings of research question 2, quite a lot of stakeholders have interests that seem to serve the wolf's interests well. Take for instance the interests regarding complete and naturally functioning ecosystems, increasing societal support for the wolf and protecting the wolf. This gives the impression that the wolves' interests would be represented at the negotiations. At the same time, most parties that have these interests focus on the population of wolves and not on individual animals. As long as the population is healthy, their interests will not be damaged if sometimes a wolf is killed. Of course, if we assume that wolves have agency, it is safe to assume that no wolf would choose to be shot, thus their interests would not be protected in an agreement that allows for lethal management.

There are no more than a few stakeholders who promote the intrinsic value of individual animals and who said that the wolf itself is a stakeholder of this topic. Unfortunately for the wolf, the parties who seem to advocate for the protection and assistance of individual wolves the most, are also the parties who are most sceptical towards a consensus building process. One organisation especially was critical towards negotiations about the wolf, due to fear that the outcomes would only harm the wolf, making them the least willing to participate in negotiations if they were to take place. Therefore, the interests of the wolf would likely not be well-represented at the table. Many parties indicated they would like to talk about the circumstances under which wolves could be managed, or about areas where they would not be welcome. On the other hand, there are many parties who would wish to leave the wolf alone and give it more space. However, as explained previously, the majority of these parties only look at the wolf as a species and not as individuals.

An interesting concluding thought is that, if there is truth in Donaldson's statement that increased presence of an animal leads to increased consideration of them in political processes, perhaps the wolf's interests would be better protected if it was more visible. Insights from environmental psychology tell us that risk perception depends (partly) on the ease with which one can recount a certain event occurring (Swim & Whitmarsh, 2018). For example, having much media coverage on wolf attacks on livestock makes one more likely to feel as if the wolf is a danger to farm animals. For this reason, the type of visibility might be impactful on way the wolf's interests would be considered in a political process such as these negotiations. Being exposed to many negative stories about it, would likely make people focus on protecting their own interest in safety more, while being exposed to it in a positive light would make people focus on safeguarding the wolf's interest more.

## **7.6 Reflections and limitations of this study**

As with any research, there are some limitations to this study. First and foremost, being involved with the conflict assessment as an intern, I did not always have full freedom to execute things as I would have done as a true 'outsider' to the project or the one in charge. For example, shortly explaining the theory of mutual gains negotiations to stakeholders would have made it possible to ask participants how they feel about negotiating at the basis of interests and whether they would find this a suitable approach. This would have allowed for a better informed answer

to the question on opportunities and challenges of using this strategy. However, for the sake of the assessment it was important to make sure that the participants were able to say whatever they wanted to say in the interviews and to allow them to build trust in the process and the assessor, so that they would be more inclined to be open for a 'new' type of negotiation, when this is explained to them at a later stage.

Secondly, a downside to this study is that none of the research questions can be answered with conclusive evidence. This is of course a difficulty for most studies, especially qualitative research. However, especially the answers research question 3 and 4 could be different depending on the researcher and how they interpret the findings and literature. This is not to say the answers to them are not well substantiated, it is merely a caution to the reader that these conclusions are my own, they are not factual.

Thirdly, as a result of time constraints, with a significant portion of the time available for this thesis being spent on planning interviews, doing them, writing up the interview reports and staying in contact with participants to make sure they would check the reports, it was not possible to be as thorough as I would have preferred in the analysis. For instance, it would have been interesting to look further into whether there are any noticeable differences in the answers of stakeholders from different categories, but there simply was no time to do so.

Fourthly, many stakeholders were given some explanation on why the assessment was found necessary by the initiators. At the start of the interviews, the assessor gave a presentation at a meeting of the Landelijk Overleg Wolf to explain how this would differ from their structure and approach and why it would be beneficial to participate in the assessment. Some other parties asked why they had been invited to speak about a topic they are barely involved with. All this information that was provided to the participants of the assessment could have influenced their answers to some of the questions, especially the ones on the necessity of a broad societal dialogue. They were never presented with possible answers to the core questions, but they were explained why the assessment was set up in some cases. Potentially, if no party had received any prior information, the general picture would have been more sceptic towards a broad discussion, but this should not be highly problematic to the research, since participants were now able to form their own ideas about the reasoning they were presented with.

Fifthly, I feel as though I was able to paint quite an accurate picture of how the stakeholders view the wolf and what the interests are that underlie their opinions. However, as is the case with many large-scale dialogues, 'the citizen' without any attachment to the wolf could not be interviewed. Of course, the silent majority is represented through those societal organisations that were interviewed, yet it remains impossible to represent the interests of the average citizen, since there simply is no such thing – there is simply too much variety amongst all of the country's inhabitants. It might be argued that a consensus as agreed upon by the stakeholders which were identified does not truly reflect society's interests for this reason, but I have yet to come across a practical solution that would address this problem.

Sixthly, the conclusion on research question 4a was that from a critical theory perspective, the interests of the wolf likely would not be well represented at the table, if

negotiations were to take place. Some prominent scholars in the field of animal rights and political processes have convincingly argued for the recognition of animals as political actors (see Donaldson, & Kymlicka, 2011; Meijer, 2017). They would claim that the agency of wolves should be respected and they should be allowed to shape their own future, without being restricted by the more powerful party who makes decisions for them, namely humans. For example, if a wolf decides it wants to explore a new area or settle down somewhere, it should not be denied access to these spaces. However, the concept of ‘animal agora’ (which Donaldson proposes as a way to provide animals with political agency), in which futures are shaped using input from animals, was based on domesticated animals. Such a society would be much more unfeasible to achieve if wild animals were also granted co-authorship of it. Moreover, I agree with Cochrane, Garner and O’Sullivan (2018) that it is most productive to help animals through practically achievable processes and it might be unrealistic to aim for governance to be completely restructured for the sake of granting wild animals political agency, especially if the starting point is negotiations between (human) stakeholders.

### **7.7 Recommendations for future research and for other societal dialogues**

This study looked into the potential of mutual gains negotiations to bring parties together and come up with an agreement on the future of the wolf in the Netherlands. There are not many examples available of consensus building processes that revolve around issues that concern multiple species. One conclusion was that this approach might be successful at preventing polarisation and reaching consensus on this topic. However, it would be valuable to develop a strategy that would allow for better protection of animal interests in such negotiations. Currently, political participation of animals is not possible in consensus building processes, aside from indirect representation by humans. To my knowledge, no method has been developed to safeguard animal interests in human dialogues or to grant animals more political agency in dialogues that concern them.

Furthermore, there is not much literature available on the possibilities and difficulties of governmental agencies participating in societal dialogues (some are briefly described in Susskind et al., 1999). More insights into how this could be structured to ensure that there is no large power difference between participants and to ensure commitment to the outcome of the process would be useful.

An important recommendation for future societal dialogues is based on Noelle Aarts’ work. She stresses, just as is advocated for in the MGA, that an exchange of positions will not lead anywhere. Dialogues are not meant to have a ‘winner’, all participants should go into it looking to find more understanding for the other and prepared to work together as a team, to find solutions to their common issue. According to Aarts, it is important to recognise your mutual dependency on each other to come to a satisfying conclusion (Aarts, 2020). In the case of the wolf, I would expect most parties’ BATNAs not to be very strong and there to be mutual dependency between stakeholders. For those who are happy the wolf is back, there remains a chance that those who are not happy will keep protesting the regulations until they are changed,

or that people will take matters into their own hands and start shooting wolves (as has already happened in the Netherlands). For those who are not happy the wolf is back, if they do not work together with the ‘other side’, the situation will stay the same and they will remain to be harmed economically and psychologically as a result of the wolf. The problem will not solve itself, for none of the stakeholders. The only way to move forward is to start the conversation, and put everything on the table that shape your positions - emotions, norms, values and assumptions – for these are the things that form your interests, or what you truly want to achieve.

## **8. Conclusion**

The return of the wolf to the Netherlands has been met with both excitement and concern. Whereas it is celebrated as a symbol of nature’s resilience and a reward for effective nature policy by some, it is seen as a threat to agricultural businesses or to people by others. Stakeholders are taking a stance regarding how we ought to deal with the return of this large predator to our small country and this discussion is rapidly polarising. This thesis looked into the potential to coming to consensus between all stakeholders through a conflict assessment (which is part of a consensus building process) that was initiated by IFAW and the Hunters’ Association. It identified 35 organisations to be stakeholders, a group that seems to cover the spectrum of different perspectives regarding the wolf. Considering that despite the differences in their opinions, there was no strong conflict in interests between the stakeholders, and nearly all parties were willing to work together and speak to others about the topic, there seems to be a good chance that engaging in mutual gains negotiations might be successful. Furthermore, there might be some downsides to using the MGA, but nevertheless it still seems to be a suitable strategy to prevent conflict. In case a dialogue will take place as a result of this assessment, it would be beneficial for all parties to move away from their positions and take the conversation to a deeper level, and for those who advocate for the interests of the wolf to participate as well. All in all, despite an increasingly polarising discussion, perhaps conflict can still be averted and a mutually beneficial solution for everyone can be found.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix I. List of stakeholders that participated in the assessment.**

#### *The Agricultural Sector and Other Animal Keepers:*

##### Land- en Tuinbouworganisatie Nederland (LTO)

LTO is an organisation that advocates for the agricultural sector by aiming to influence governmental institutions at the national and European level. The organisation consists of three regional organisations: North, South and Limburg. Its work revolves around 19 different branches within the agricultural sector in the Netherlands, such as dairy farms, sheep farms, beef cattle farms, agriculture, (greenhouse) horticulture and mushroom cultivation. Most of LTO's 35.000 members are agricultural entrepreneurs.

##### Platform Kleinschalige Schapen- en Geitenhouders (Platform KSG)

Platform KSG is a platform that brings together 23 breed clubs of sheep and goats in the Netherlands. Individual keepers of sheep or goats cannot join the platform. The purpose of the organisation is to advocate for small-scale sheep and goat husbandry, as keepers of small amounts of animals (often less than 10) tend to be (negatively) impacted by national policy, which is created for large-scale husbandry. Platform KSG intends to conserve the different breeds of sheep and goats and to make sure it remains possible, and feasible, to own a small number of animals.

##### Vereniging Gescheperde Schaapskudden Nederland (VGSN)

VGSN is an association whose members are companies and foundations who use flocks of sheep for landscape management. The main purpose of the association is to advocate for a good perspective of the future for such companies towards (amongst others) governmental organisations and terrain owners. It aims to improve the usage of flocks of sheep for nature management, conservation of cultural-historical values, conservation of old sheep breeds and fulfilment of recreational functions. Around 44 organisations or shepherds are member of VGSN.

##### Nederlandse Vakbond Pluimveehouders (NVP)

The NVP advocates for the interests of poultry farmers in the Netherlands, in order to improve the position of poultry farmers and secure a vital future for them. The NVM intends to independently lobby for the sector. Its motto is that what is consumed in the Netherlands, should be produced in the Netherlands.

##### FREE Nature (FREE)

FREE Nature is a nature organisation that aims to recover ecological processes in nature. They intend to stimulate this by using large grazing animals to graze nature areas. By using these large herbivores as naturally as possible, with little human interference, they intend to make them an integral part of the ecosystem, so that it can function on its own. FREE Nature also provides courses and information on the recovery of natural processes and natural grazing.

### Farmers Defence Force (FDF)

FDF was created as a reaction to fierce protests against the agricultural sector, especially livestock farmers. Its initial purpose was to protect farmers, in a broad sense. Since then it has grown to be an interest organisation for the agricultural sector with thousands of members. After organising several large protests, they are now working more moderately by lobbying and informing the public about its sector. FDF represents the entire spectrum of agriculture (crop production, horticulture, livestock farmers; both extensive and intensive farming).

### Koninklijk Warmbloed Paard Nederland (KWPN)

The KWPN leads an 'open' breeding programme for sports horses. It has around 20 thousand members and register around 11 thousand foals a year, making it responsible for one of the world's largest horse studbooks.

### Vereniging de Moeflon

'Association the Mouflon' aims to conserve the mouflon population in the Netherlands and improve their well-being, partly by trying to get it acknowledged as a native species to the Netherlands.. It also advocates for those who are involved with the management of mouflon herds in the Netherlands, organising activities for them and generating relevant news for them. The mouflon is a breed of sheep which originates from Corsica. It has been present in the Netherlands for around a hundred years and is often used as a natural tool for nature management: it is one of the only species that eats tree saplings and can thus contribute to keeping landscapes open. Besides this useful trait of the breed, the nearly 200 members of the association also appreciate its looks.

### Terrain Managing Organisations and Landowners

#### Staatsbosbeheer

Staatsbosbeheer is an independent governance organisation with a legal task, which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. It is commissioned by the State to manage hundreds of thousands of hectares of nature and other landscapes in the Netherlands. It contributes to state goals, but maintains partial freedom in deciding how to do so through its work. Much of its funding comes from governmental agencies and it also reports on its objectives based on subsidy schemes with the provinces. Staatsbosbeheer aims to contribute to state goals, many of these relating to natural areas, and at the same time create awareness on the necessity of maintaining a certain quality of biodiversity in all 'Natuurnetwerk Nederland' areas. When working on problems, it intends to work together with provinces in finding solutions, instead of rivalling them.

#### Natuurmonumenten

Natuurmonumenten is a terrain managing organisation which manages around 120 thousand hectares of nature in the Netherlands. It recovers landscapes and nature areas and also create new nature, often in collaboration with other parties such as the government and nature organisations. Natuurmonumenten aims to maintain and protect nature in the Netherlands and advocate for the importance of a 'base quality' of nature, also outside of its areas and protected natural areas. Natuurmonumenten is an association, with around 760 thousand members and donors.

### LandschappenNL

LandschappenNL is a foundation which is an overarching organisation for 19 independent provincial landscape managing organisations. LandschappenNL lobbies on their behalf. The mission of LandschappenNL is to improve the quality of landscapes, nature and cultural heritage of the Netherlands and increasing the involvement of people with these areas.

### Federatie Particulier Grondbezit (FPG)

FPG is an association for private land owners, consisting of 10 provincial associations. Its goal is to contribute to economically viable and socially responsible private landownership, through advocacy work on all governmental levels. It aims to increase self-determination over private properties. It also provides information and other services to its members. FPG's 1600 members together own around 200 thousand hectares of land, collectively being the largest land owner of the country.

### Stichting Nationaal Park de Hoge Veluwe

The National Park de Hoge Veluwe is a foundation which manages the Netherlands' largest private plot of land. Its goal is to independently preserve the natural estate. It also aims to conserve and improve biodiversity on its land and maintain the culture, history and archeology on the grounds. The 600.000 yearly visitors contribute to these goals by providing financial independence for the foundation. In the management of its grounds, de Hoge Veluwe attempts to keep alive the memory of the Kröller-Müllers, the original owners of the land, while also going with the times in the execution of its land management.

### ARK Natuurontwikkeling (ARK)

ARK is a private nature organisation which protects and develops nature areas. Its main goal is to contribute to more freely accessible 'robust' and wild nature in the Netherlands. Robust in this context means that it persists mostly due to natural processes, with as little human interference as possible. ARK mostly develops projects in collaboration with landowners, it generally does not own the lands itself.

### *Nature and Animal Conservationists*

#### International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

IFAW is an international NGO with the purpose of protecting the welfare of wild animals, both at a population level and on an individual level. Its work consists of saving animals, rehabilitating them and releasing them back into the wild. Besides this, it works on the protection and improvement of their natural living environments and on human-wildlife coexistence. It feels that neither animals nor humans should be disadvantaged by coexistence with the other, which is why it initiated this assessment in collaboration with the Hunters' Association.

#### Wereld Natuurfonds (WNF)

WWF is an international NGO that aims to recover the relationship between humans and nature. Its focus is on the protection of biodiversity. The Dutch branch of the organisation, WNF, has nearly 800.000 donors. Its work in the Netherlands is centered around seven themes: wildlife, oceans, forests, food, climate, fresh water and biodiversity.

### Zoogdiervereniging

The Dutch Mammal Society is an association with nearly 1600 members and thousands of volunteers who work on monitoring. The mission of the Dutch Mammal Society is to contribute to the conservation and strengthening of all populations of native wild mammals in the Netherlands. This is mostly done by focusing on the creation of safe living environments in which mammal populations can be sustained and working to improve coexistence between humans and wild mammals.

### De Faunabescherming

The 'fauna protection' foundation is a volunteer organisation that advocates for animals that live in the wild. It aims to protect these animals through provision of information, but also through protest actions and legal procedures against unnecessary or non-scientific-based fauna management.

### *Nature Management and Fauna Management*

#### Koninklijke Nederlandse Jagersvereniging

The Hunters' Association is an association for hunters, with more than 20 thousand members. Many of its members do fauna management commissioned by governmental agencies, some also hunt for food. The Hunters' Association advocates for the interest of hunters at different levels of government and works on projects and research. Its mission is to improve policy for hunters and game management units (GMUs) and get the hunter appreciated by society as a professional volunteer, who can continue to hunt for fauna management and for food.

#### Nederlandse Organisatie voor Jacht en Grondbeheer (NOJG)

The NOJG is an association focused on hunting, land ownership and wildlife damage control. It has more than 5000 members, not nearly all of which are hunters themselves. The NOJG is similar to the Hunters' Association in many respects, but its focus is on controlling damage of wildlife on private property, often farms. Farmers often incur losses due to wildlife, such as geese, and the NOJG advocates for the damage control 'sector'. The NOJG is also lobbying for the possibility to lethally manage species which are not recognised as game, when a permit is issued for this.

#### Koninklijke Nederlandse Vereniging voor Natuurtoezicht (KNVvN)

The KNVvN is an association who advocates for people who do supervision in nature areas. These people are called 'BOA's', they keep natural areas safe by supervision and enforcement of the law, often in collaboration with police. The KNVvN provides them with education and information and maintains a platform through which its members can work together.

### *Land Users: the Recreational Sector and Tourism*

#### ANWB

The ANWB is the Netherlands' largest association with nearly 5 million members, making its following highly diverse. The ANWB is both a company and an association. Its work

revolves around different themes, namely: nature and landscapes; recreation; tourism and mobility. It advocates for more affordability, accessibility, liveability and security within tourism and mobility, amongst other goals. Besides its lobbying work, the ANWB offers services such as insurances, products and judicial assistance and aims to create a clear societal function for its services.

#### HISWA-RECRON

HISWA-RECRON is an association for the recreational and water sports industry. Its 2400 members are all entrepreneurs in this sector, offering recreational activities (mostly sports related) or overnight stays to guests. Examples of industry-groups whose interests are represented by HISWA-RECRON include campings, bungalow parks, outdoor sports businesses, boat rentals and marinas. Besides its advocacy work, it also offers services to its members and customers of its members.

#### Nederlandse Toer Fiets Unie (NTFU)

The NTFU advocates for the interests of people who bike for sports, such as mountainbikers and cycle racers. It focuses on improving quality and safety of bike sports, facilitating good infrastructure, good cycling clubs and sufficient supply of services. This is done by providing information to its following and offering services such as insurance and help for route maintenance. Around 75 thousand people are member of the NTFU, the majority of which is a member through its personal cycling club.

#### Wandelnet

Wandelnet is a foundation that works on improving the quality of walking hiking in the Netherlands. Its work consists of finding and marking new routes and protecting the fragile infrastructure of the hiker, for example through lobbying activities, research and service provision.

#### Raad van Beheer op Kynologisch Gebied in Nederland (Raad van Beheer)

The RvB is the Dutch kennel club. It is an association whose members are also associations relating to dogs. Some of these are breed clubs, others are regional associations which offer courses, training and competitions, yet others have specialised goals. The RvB aims to improve canine health and well-being, but also wants dogs to be appreciated in society. It also maintains the national studbook for purebred dogs and provide courses and information.

#### Federatie van Nederlandse Ruitersportcentra (FNRS)

The FNRS advocates for the interests of equestrian entrepreneurs. It is an association of around 450 equestrian accommodations in the Netherlands, the majority of these being riding schools, others include pensions and rearing farms. The FNRS advocates for the equestrian sector and aims to improve it as well. Member companies of the FNRS are judged by the FNRS on the quality of their services, the safety of people and horses at their accommodation and the well-being of the horses on the accommodation. The FNRS aims to prepare its members for the future.

### Koninklijke Nederlandse Hippische Sportfederatie (KNHS)

The KNHS is the overarching equestrian sports federation of the Netherlands. It wants to provide safe, honest and enjoyable equestrian sports by advocating for the sport and trying to get the horse acknowledged as a part of our society. It also organises competitions within equestrian sports. Equestrian well-being and safe and honest sports are central in its work.

### Government Agencies and Representatives

#### Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV)

This ministry is a government body at the national level. Its work revolves around stimulation sustainable, sufficient and safe food; valuable nature and a vital countryside. The ministry is in charge of research, prepares new policies, laws and regulations and stimulates innovation within its dossiers.

#### Interprovinciaal Overleg (IPO)

IPO is an association that unites the twelve Dutch provinces. It does advocacy work on their behalf towards the national government and the European Union. Besides this, it provides a platform that allows for information exchange between the provinces and stimulates innovation. The main aim of IPO is to support the provinces in their tasks and improve communal decision-making between them.

#### BIJ12

BIJ12 is part of IPO, but functions as its own organisation. BIJ12 is the executive organisation of the provinces, helping them with the executing of legal tasks and providing knowledge, information and data about rural areas and the physical environment. Its work revolves around the provincial tasks relating to nature, rural areas and the physical environment. For example, it bears the responsibility for everything related to damage by fauna, coordination of monitoring processes and gathering and presenting data.

#### Verenging Nederlandse Gemeenten (VNG)

VNG is an association whose members are all municipalities of the Netherlands and the overseas territories of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. VNG's goal is to stimulate a 'powerful local government', supporting and improving the quality of municipalities. It advocates for municipalities on different platforms, stimulate knowledge exchange among members, develop products and services for its members and work on tackling societal issues together.

### Other Involved Parties

#### Wolf-Fencing Nederland

Wolf-Fencing was set up as a volunteer organisation helping sheep farmers with placing wolf-proof fences. The purpose of this was to create public support for the wolf, by protecting livestock from it. Wolf-Fencing worked together with BIJ12 to create the norms for wolf-proof fencing that are currently used in the Interprovincial Plan. Currently, Wolf-Fencing is focused on providing information and advice on wolf resistant measures and on the wolf itself. It will also check whether fences are installed properly on invitation.

### No-Wolves Benelux

No-Wolves Benelux is a small foundation, with the main purpose of providing information about the wolf. It uses knowledge and experience from abroad to provide a complete picture about the consequences of its return to the Netherlands. The purpose of the organisation is to provide honest and complete information about the wolf and to stimulate serious contemplation about necessary adaptations in human behaviour if the wolf is accepted back into the country.

### Stichting Annemieke

The Foundation Annemieke was set up in reaction to starving horses in the Oostvaardersplassen in 2018. She found it unacceptable that these animals were placed behind a fence, but not fed. Diving deep into this issue progressed into her fight against the rewilding ideology and relating wrongdoings of nature organisations. She aims to tell a truthful story and uncover the facts about nature management in the Netherlands. The foundation has a following of around 50 thousand people on Facebook.

## **Appendix II. Complete interview question list.**

The questions which were used to answer the research questions of this thesis are underlined.

### *General questions*

1. What is your organisation?
2. What is the interest of your organisation: what do you want to achieve regarding the wolf?
3. What does your organisation do in relation to the wolf in the Netherlands?
4. How important is the dossier wolf for your organisation? (impact, contribution towards, the role you play)
5. Do you agree with IFAW and the Hunters' Association that the future of the wolf in the Netherlands should be discussed?

### *Main questions*

6. What are important topics within this theme for your organisation? Why are those topics important to you and the people you represent?
  - a. What are your positions regarding these topics?
  - b. What 3 topics are most important to you?
7. What are your concerns regarding the wolf in the Netherlands? Are there specific concerns from you or the people you represent? Why do these things concern you?
  - a. What are your positions regarding these concerns?
  - b. What 3 concerns are most important to you?
8. Which solutions would you propose to the problems relating to the wolf and why?
9. Which groups of stakeholders do you identify within this theme?
10. Which options do you see to prevent conflict between stakeholders? Do you see any options for potential mutually beneficial solutions?
11. Would you be willing to search for such mutually beneficial solutions with other stakeholders?
12. Is there anything that should be researched better or that should be better defined in case a dialogue were to take place regarding the wolf? What knowledge is lacking? Why is it important to research these things?

### *Rounding up: questions concerning the assessment and final questions*

13. With which other parties are you in conversation about the wolf in the Netherlands? With which other organisations are you collaborating?
14. In case a dialogue will take place, would you be willing to participate in it? In what way, would there be any conditions tied to this for you?
15. Do you have any suggestions for other parties to interview?
16. AOB. Is there anything you would like to say? Do you have any questions or remarks?
17. Explanation regarding the processing of the interview. Do you agree with this?
18. Information regarding how the data from the interview will be used in the report for stakeholders and this thesis. Do we have your consent to use the information from the accorded interview report? Would you like the findings to be anonymised in either the assessment report or the thesis?

**Appendix III. Template of an interview report.**

<b>Organisation</b>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>E-mail address</b>	<b>Telephone number</b>

<b>Interest of the organisation / what does it represent / what does it want to achieve regarding the wolf in the Netherlands?</b>

<b>What does your organisation do regarding the wolf in the Netherlands?</b> Activities, providing information, representing interests, actions etc.

<b>How important is the dossier wolf for your organisation?</b>

<b>What are important topics within this theme for your organisation?</b>	<b>Why?</b> (what is the underlying interest) <b>Why is this important for the people you represent?</b>	<b>Position / explanation</b>

<b>What 3 topics are most important to you?</b>

<b>Concerns regarding the wolf in the Netherlands? Are there specific concerns from you or the people you represent?</b>	<b>Why?</b> (what is the underlying interest)	<b>Position / explanation</b>

<b>What 3 concerns are most important to you?</b>

<b>Which solutions would you propose to the problems relating to the wolf?</b>	<b>Why?</b> What would this solve?

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<b>Which groups of stakeholders do you identify within this theme?</b>

<b>Which options do you see to prevent conflict between stakeholders? Do you see any options for mutually beneficial solutions?</b>

<b>Would you be willing to search for such mutually beneficial solutions with other stakeholders?</b>

<b>Is there anything that should be researched better or that should be better defined in case a dialogue were to take place regarding the wolf? What knowledge is lacking?</b>	<b>Why?</b> What does that contribute towards?

<b>With which other parties are you in conversation about the wolf in the Netherlands?</b>
<b>With which other parties do you collaborate?</b>

<b>Willingness participation / involvement to process?</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Why?</b>
<b>Attitude regarding process</b>		
<b>Willingness participation</b>		
<b>Conditions / wishes for participation</b>		

<b>Suggestions for interviewing other stakeholders?</b>
<b>Any other business</b>

<b>Finishing up</b>
Reading the interview report (who, when to receive it, when to return it):
Agreements regarding confidentiality: