

FACE PRESS RELEASE

European Federation for Hunting and Conservation



Hunting under the Birds Directive: An open debate on the state of play

Event of the “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup - 25 February 2021

On 25 February 2021, the European Parliament’s “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup hosted a high-level conference on “**Hunting under the Birds Directive: An open debate on the state of play**”, organised in conjunction with the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE).

The event was chaired by the President of the Intergroup, **MEP Álvaro Amaro** (Portugal, EPP), with opening interventions by **MEP Alex Agius Saliba** (Malta, S&D) and **MEP Isabel Benjumea** (Spain, EPP).

The opening message was delivered by **MEP Álvaro Amaro**, who stressed the importance of relying on a science-based approach to hunting and conservation in Europe: *“Hunting is a millenary human practice, which is highly regulated by our Member States. There are good examples of how hunting benefits conservation across Europe. For example, FACE Biodiversity Manifesto contains a substantial database of over 450 hunting-related conservation projects. Bird conservation in Europe is a complex issue and must take into account the different pressures our European ecosystems are suffering, which are multiple and vary from pollution to habitat loss [...] I believe that we need a science-based approach, relying on updated and extensive data [...] concerning, for example, populations’ size and habitat conditions. These figures would certainly produce better analyses and consequently better Regulations”.*

MEP Alex Agius Saliba introduced a video produced by the Federation for Hunting and Conservation of Malta (FKNK), which explained the small-scale and culturally-important ancient practice of finch trapping practices in Malta. In his intervention, he stressed the need to protect regional hunting activities, which are highly regulated and critically important to hunters and trappers that carry out their long-standing traditions in a sustainable way. MEP Agius Saliba stated that: *“Coming from Malta, I know very well the importance of achieving conservation goals while protecting regional hunting practices. Recognising the value of these hunting practices, which are allowed under strict conditions established by the Birds Directive, is key to protect their social and cultural dimension. It is, therefore, important that those strict conditions do not become impossible to fulfil. It is very unfortunate that it is becoming more so. Back in 1979, when the Birds Directive was adopted, the EU law-maker was aware that any environmental policy must involve all the actors on the ground to be successful in the long term”.*

MEP Isabel Benjumea underlined that banning Turtle Dove hunting in Spain and France would be a risk to the species, because of the solid conservation efforts in place by hunters. She stated: *“To be successful in the long term, the Birds Directive, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and their policies must also guarantee a balance between environmental, socio-economic, and*

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cultural interests. Hunting in Spain represents a significant activity in many rural areas and brings economic and environmental benefits. Its value can't be understated. More and more young people are managing lands in the countryside as hunting areas. This human intervention produces several benefits for both huntable and non-huntable species. Hunting often represents an incentive to adopt habitat management measures, which would no longer be adopted if a certain species were non-huntable. Hunting, and specifically in this case hunting of Turtle Dove, has an intrinsic conservation value, which can't be ignored when considering that the turtle dove population has registered a more dramatic decline in Member States where it is not a huntable species".

Micheal O'Briain, Deputy Head of Nature Unit, DG Environment, European Commission, stated that: *"The Birds Directive is the key legal framework for the conservation of wild birds in the EU. However, too many huntable species are unsecure and in decline, increasingly undermining opportunities for sustainable hunting. Hunting of such species should take only place in the framework of effective delivery of EU/international plans addressing all key pressures, including exploitation and agriculture. Important monitoring and reporting deficiencies and governance challenges still need addressing for mechanisms such as adaptive harvest management to be credibly delivered. The Commission is committed to working with Member States and stakeholders to ensure sustainable hunting in line with the Directive".*

Prof. Jesper Madsen, Aarhus University, Denmark and AEWA EGMP Data Centre, explained that: *"Waterbird populations on European flyways are, on the one hand, causing conservation concerns, and, on the other hand, management challenges. Under the auspices of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, adaptive management of huntable goose populations has been initiated to ensure sustainable use. The concept has proven beneficial in both populations with recovery objectives and population management objectives. The process requires longterm commitment by range states, capacity building, solid organisation, flexible regulatory instruments, reliable data provisioning and fast data flow. It is essential to engage stakeholders throughout, which will enhance mutual learning, trust-building and willingness to find joint solutions".*

Ariel Brunner, Acting Interim Director & Senior Head of Policy at BirdLife International, stated that: *"The Birds Directive provides a good science-based framework for conservation and has hugely reduced the negative impacts of hunting since entry to force. However, there are still many areas of poor implementation: poor enforcement, abuse of derogations, lack of bag data and shooting of threatened species outside safe biological limit. It would be crucial to plug these gaps and engage the hunting community in efforts to conserve and restore biodiversity, from proper management of Natura 2000, to reform of agricultural polices to large scale nature restoration".*

Cy Griffin, Senior Conservation Manager at FACE stated: *"Following the publication of FACE's report 'Europe's Huntable Birds: A Review of Status and Conservation Priorities' in December 2020, we have a sound basis to inform the dialogue on hunting under the Birds Directive. The fact that less than half of Annex II species are in a secure status is of great concern to FACE, but we should avoid jumping to quick conclusions as this situation is similar*

to all wild birds covered by the directive. Evidence-based conservation should follow knowledge on the status of individual species and the pressures before deciding on the best response. One thing we can be sure of is that restoration of habitats is a priority, which is why FACE advocates for a CAP that delivers for biodiversity and welcomes the EU Nature Restoration plan”.

With a good attendance of more than 220 online viewers and the additional interventions from **MEP Marco Dreosto** (Italy, ID) and **MEP Josianne Cutajar** (Malta, S&D), the meeting was moderated by **Dr. David Scallan**, FACE Secretary General, who also hosted a wide-ranging Q&A discussion.

Video recording of the meeting is available on the FACE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/FACEforHunters/videos/1103666810061037>

##ENDS##

NOTE TO EDITORS: FACE is the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation. Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe’s 7 million hunters as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organisation. FACE is made up of national hunters’ associations from 37 European countries including the EU-27. FACE is supported by 7 associate members and is based in Brussels. FACE upholds the principle of sustainable use and has been a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987. Visit www.face.eu