



## THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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### The importance of setting Favourable Reference Values (FRVs)

To assess the conservation status under the Habitats Directive, Member States are encouraged to define FRVs for the range of habitat types and species (FRR), for area of habitat types (FRA) and for population size of species (FRP). FRVs are key reference levels to determine when Favourable Conservation Status is being achieved for species and habitats listed under the Habitats Directive. Similar concepts apply to the Birds Directive even though they are spelled out less clearly and different terms are used.

Even though FRVs are essential elements to determine when FCS is reached, the latest reporting under Article 17 (2013 – 2018) has shown that they are still poorly used and often inconsistently applied across Member States. For instance, only for 9 out of 45 wolf assessments the FRP has been defined where Member States used either 'individuals' or '10x10 km grid' as a unit.

#### Example: Favourable reference population

The concept of FRVs was endorsed by the Habitats Committee back in 2004 and describes the favourable reference population as follows:

*Population in a given biogeographical region considered the minimum necessary to ensure the long-term viability of the species; favourable reference value must be at least the size of the population when the Directive came into force; information on historic distribution/population may be found useful when defining the favourable reference population; 'best expert judgement' may be used to define it in absence of other data.*

#### Setting FRVs

Knowledge about the ecology and structure of the species' populations is useful to understand the population size and spatial scale at which they function and choose the approach for setting the FRVs. Ecological information such as life history strategies, dispersal capacity, spatial and genetic structure of the population, or habitat requirements is key when setting FRVs.

For FACE, it is also essential that for species that directly impact livelihoods and have clearly next to an ecological carrying capacity also a social carrying capacity to take account of economic, social and cultural requirements when setting FRVs which is in line with Art. 2 (3) of the Habitats Directive.

For species with large home ranges (e.g. *Canis lupus*), the draft guidelines on concepts and definitions (2019–2024) suggest to set FRVs for the whole population, which may imply cooperation between MS sharing the same population (meta-population).

## Reporting FRVs

In the new reporting format for the cycle 2019-2024, new ranges have been defined when it is not possible to estimate a value for favourable reference population. The pre-defined range increments are:

- 'approximately equal to the favourable reference range (less than 5% smaller)'
- 'between 5 and 25% smaller'
- 'between 26 and 50% smaller'
- 'between 51 and 100% smaller'

After long discussions in the European Commission's Expert Group on Reporting, the Habitats Committee decided that it also can be reported when current population estimates are higher than FRVs. This is important for populations that are at the time of reporting exceeding ecological carrying capacity or are unnaturally high.

The provisional delivery time for the next Article 12 and Article 17 reports (2019 – 2024) will be by 31st July 2025.

## FACE's recommendations

FRVs should be set based on latest scientific evidence and should include economic, political, and social aspects as well. The concept of FRVs is more than just biology as the social carrying capacity is in many cases lower than the ecological carrying capacity of a habitat.