

Meeting: BSAC Report EU Parliament Hearing on Cormorants (11-05-22)

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In many European regions, increasing cormorant populations (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) are putting pressure on fisheries, aquaculture and biodiversity with heavy economic and social impacts for fishers and fish farmers. Cormorants are protected under the "Birds Directive" 2009/147/EC. As such their management can only be permitted under very strict conditions. While the legal framework affords Member States the flexibility to derogate from the strict protection, in practice cormorant management is a complex, legally uncertain and expensive exercise, shifting on economic operators such as fishers and fish farmers the costs of dealing with ever-growing cormorant populations.

Since 2008 the European Commission has refused to set up an EU wide management plan, as requested by Parliament, with dire consequences for aquaculture operators, fisheries and threatened fish species.

Meeting opened with a direct presentation from Peter van Dalen (MEP) about how all political groups have a position on cormorants and all saw a need for a meeting on this subject.

Dr Niels Jepsen of the Danish Technical Universities Institute of Aquatic Resources presented results from 20 years of research on cormorants and the problems they cause for fish stocks and nationally threatened species such as grayling.

Dr Jepsen concluded by saying that predation from cormorants is now the main regulating factor for many fish stocks, including for wild populations in well preserved/ restored habitats eg salmon and sea trout. Effects include:

- Economic loss - commercial and recreational fishing
- Cultural loss – no fishing
- Biodiversity loss – grayling, North Sea houting
- Problems in reaching WFD requirements – too few fish in rivers.

Cormorants have significant influence on fish population and conflicts remain high. Some fish populations are at an all-time-low and the only way to improve fish populations is to reduce predation from cormorants.

Anna Pyc from the Polish Carp producers and also the Polish Trout Breeders Association, presented the problems cormorants cause to aquaculture and gave as a long-term solution the need for a verified cormorant management plan with regulation of cormorants in Europe as a whole. Cormorants should not be protected in the proximity of aquacultural facilities. As a temporary solution aquaculture needs compensation.

Stefan Jäger Chairman, Kormorankommission des Deutschen Fischerei-Verbandstaked about the most important EU policy goals affecting cormorants including the CFP, WFD and FFH. The main cause of the negative development of German and Austrian Grayling

stocks is cormorants. He called for an pan EU Cormorant Management plan as the EU parliament called for in 2008.

Anouk Puymartin from Bird Life International presented research into cormorants showing a long term population growth with a trend to stabilisation in the short term. She talked about little or no evidence of top down effects on fish populations and population level management is unlikely to be a viable option to deal with cormorant fishery interactions. On site specific actions are more likely to lead to better results for specific areas that population level management. Final message was on the need for habitat restoration that is good for cormorants and fish and there is no need for EU wide cormorant management.

The last speaker Mr Belà Halasi-Kovács from the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers talked about the risk for complete termination of fish stocks could be expected without intervention and also significant damage to endangered fish populations in natural water bodies, particularly in winter time.

The Hearing finished with an interesting question and answer session (see video link).

Sören Gade MEP finished the meeting with thanks to the speakers and surprise at the fact that the Commission was not in the panel. It is without doubt that cormorants cost society time and money but also threatens key fish species and has become a threat to biodiversity. He hoped that the Commission has taken note of the hearing and will present a proposal soon that will enable us to move cormorants to Annex 2 of the Birds Directive and there is a need for stronger and more comprehensive tools than we have today. There is probably a large majority in the parliament to act and he hoped that the Commission listens to people in the real world and act to reduce the number of these birds.

Link to presentations [Public hearing on Cormorant problematic affecting EU fisheries and aquaculture | Hearings | Events | PECH | Committees | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

Link to video recording [European Parliament Multimedia Centre \(europa.eu\)](#)

Thoughts or recommendations to the BSAC for follow-up/action:

Report within the BSAC and follow up