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EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/C1/AK/ms

Dear Mr Ronelöv Olsson, dear Mr Zieliński,

I would like to thank the NSAC and BSAC for their joint recommendation about predator management. I am very much aware of the conflicts between fisheries and predators which can be quite severe in some areas. We are taking this topic very seriously.

I fully agree with you that ecosystem recovery is the priority and ecosystem-based management plays a crucial role in that regard. We have asked ICES in a recent special request about rebuilding advice to update its natural mortality estimates as regards predators. The EU funds can indeed be used for example to develop seal-safe gears and compensate for certain losses.

In particular, regarding cormorants, in March this year, the Commission published a new guidance on the implementation of the Birds Directive ([1]), including a dedicated annex on the Great Cormorant, clarifying how derogation provisions can be applied and providing best practices from across the EU. The document outlines a step-by-step approach to managing these conflicts, through non-lethal solutions, which may include habitat management, the use of scaring devices, or adjustments to farming or fishing practices. Derogations can be considered if these measures prove ineffective. Any culling or lethal control must be strictly limited in scope and duration, with clear justification provided for why non-lethal methods were insufficient. By prioritising preventive and non-lethal measures, the guidance aims to minimise the need for derogations while still addressing the legitimate concerns of affected sectors. The guidance also highlights the importance of cross-border cooperation, particularly for migratory species, to ensure that conflicts are managed consistently across different Member States.

As acknowledged in your letter, there is an urgent need for comprehensive data that represent the current status, migration patterns and predation impacts of cormorants across Europe. To support this, the Commission launched a call for tender in June 2026 for a service contract to support the coordinated pan-European censuses of wintering and breeding populations in 2027 and to review the latest research on cormorant interactions with fisheries, aquaculture, protected fish species, as well as the species' ecological

([1]) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/4094/oj/eng

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impact, ecosystem services and conflict management strategies. It will be a three-year contract with an aim to provide a solid knowledge base for effective policy decisions.

The Commission's Strategic Guidelines for EU Aquaculture (2021-2030) recognise that predators, including protected species such as cormorants, are a challenge, particularly for freshwater aquaculture. In the context of the implementation of these guidelines, and as announced in the European Ocean Pact, a document on the management of predators will be developed in 2027.

The Commission takes note of the recommendations concerning the interactions between grey seals and fisheries in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The Commission recognises that such interactions can give rise to challenges for fisheries. Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) are listed in Annexes II and V to the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). As a species listed in Annex II, Member States are required to designate Special Areas of Conservation for its conservation, while, as a species listed in Annex V, any exploitation of the species must be compatible with maintaining it in a favourable conservation status. Any management measures concerning grey seals therefore need to comply with the applicable requirements of the Habitats Directive and be based on sound scientific evidence.

Finally, the Commission is performing a stress test of the Birds and Habitats Directives in 2026, as part of its broader agenda to simplify EU rules and reduce disproportionate administrative burdens. The stress test examines whether the Directives can be implemented more efficiently while maintaining their conservation objectives and existing level of environmental protection. One of the three main topics of the stress test concerns species protection and derogations, and procedures for adapting the annexes to scientific and technical progress. From May to August 2026, a public consultation gathered the opinions of citizens, public authorities and all stakeholders, including at national and regional level. All Member States and more than 100 stakeholder organisations, from businesses to farmers and civil society, were also invited to contribute through a structured and targeted consultation process to gather further evidence until end of June. The results of the stress test – planned for end 2026 – will form the basis for the Commission to decide on the appropriate follow up.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu or the colleagues in DG Environment (Ms Anna Cheilari for issues related to cormorants (anna.cheilari@ec.europa.eu).

Yours sincerely,

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