

Towards a 'European Cormorant Management Plan' to minimize the increasing impact of cormorants on fish stocks, fisheries and aquaculture

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The European Parliament adopted, by 558 votes to 7 with 18 abstentions, a resolution on the application of a European cormorant management plan to minimise the increasing impact of cormorants on fish stocks, fishing and aquaculture.

The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration by Heinz **KINDERMANN** (PES, DE) on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries.

MEPs called on the Commission to consider all the legal means at its disposal to reduce the negative effects of cormorant populations on fishing and aquaculture and to propose solutions to the cormorant problem in this context. The Commission and the Member States are called upon, by promoting regular scientific research, to provide reliable and generally recognised data on the total size and structure of cormorant populations in Europe, as well as their fertility and mortality parameters. According to the report, the total population of cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) has grown twenty-fold over the past 25 years and is now estimated to comprise at least 1.7 to 1.8 million birds. Cormorants have caused proven permanent damage to aquaculture undertakings and stocks of many wild fish species in the inland waterways and along sea coasts in many Member States of the European Union. They have also caused permanent damage to vegetation in certain geographical areas and the risk of serious damage increases disproportionately the closer the cormorant population in a given region approaches the carrying capacity of the region's large bodies of water, thus at the same time greatly reducing the effectiveness of local protective measures.

The Commission is also called upon to submit a **cormorant population management plan in several stages**, seeking to integrate cormorant populations into the environment as developed and cultivated by man in the long term without jeopardising the objectives of the Wild Birds Directive and Natura 2000 as regards fish species and marine and freshwater ecosystems. MEPs urge the Commission, in the interests of greater legal certainty and uniform interpretation, to provide without delay a clear definition of the term 'serious damage' as used in Article 9(1)(a), third indent, of the Wild Birds Directive (The Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) of 2 April 1979). The Commission should also produce more generalised guidance on the nature of the derogations allowed under Article 9(1) of the Wild Birds Directive, including further clarification of the terminology where any ambiguity may exist.

In this context, MEPs suggest that, by means of systematic monitoring of cormorant populations supported by the EU and the Member States, a reliable, generally recognised and annually updated database should be drawn up on the development, size and geographical distribution of cormorant populations in Europe. They call on the Commission to put out to tender, and finance, a **scientific project** aimed at supplying an estimation model for the size and structure of the **total cormorant population** on the basis of currently available data on breeding population, fertility and mortality. The Commission and the Member States are called upon to foster in an appropriate manner the creation of suitable conditions for bilateral and multilateral scientific and administrative exchanges, both within the EU and with third countries.

The Commission and the Member States are also called to:

- promote the sustainable management of cormorant populations by means of increased scientific and administrative coordination, cooperation and communication, and to create appropriate conditions for the drafting of a Europe-wide cormorant population management plan;
- make some of the funds earmarked in the EU budget for data collection in the fisheries sector, in particular under heading 11 07 02: ‘Support for the management of fishery resources (improvement of scientific advice)’, available for investigations, analyses and forecasts of the cormorant population on the territory of the European Union, in preparation for the future regular monitoring of these species.