



Intergroup/Intergroupe/Intergruppe/ Intergruppo/Intergrupo  
in the European Parliament



**SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES**

Wildlife Management, Angling, Forestry and Nature Conservation

**CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES**

Gestion de la faune sauvage, Pêche, Sylviculture et Conservation de la nature

**NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN**

Wildtiermanagement, Angeln, Forstwirtschaft und Naturschutz

**CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI**

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**Minutes of the meeting**

**Wednesday 23 May 2007, 16 h 30– 17 h 30**

*The pressure of predatory birds on the ecosystems: damages caused by corvids, gulls and cormorants*

**MEPs**

BACO, Peter (NA, SK)  
BUSK, Niels (ALDE, DK)  
BUZEK, Jerzy (EPP-ED, PL)  
DESS, Albert (EPP-ED, DE)  
EBNER, Michl (EPP, IT)  
EK, Lena (ALDE, SWE)  
FLORENZ, Karl-Heinz (EPP-ED, DE)  
GOUDIN, Hélène (IND/DEM, SWE)

HELMER, Roger (NA, UK)  
KELEMEN, Attila (EPP-ED, RO)  
KINDERMANN, Heinz (PES, DE)  
KOHlíCEK, Jaromír (GUE/NGL, CZ)  
MATHIEU Véronique (EPP-ED, FR)  
PIEPER, Markus (EPP-ED, DE)  
SCHIERHUBER, Agnes (EPP-ED, AT)  
SOFIANSKI, Stefan (EPP-ED, BG)

**Represented**

BRAGHETTO, Iles (EPP-ED, IT)  
RÜBIG, Paul (EPP-ED, AT)

NAVARRO, Robert (PES, FR)

**Experts/Observers**

KEANE, Charles (ILO, ELO)  
BANA, Giovanni (FACE)  
BRECKLING, Peter (DFV)  
BUTEL, Yves (FACE)  
DUPERRON, Gilles (WHF)  
HALKO, Norbert (OF)  
KAPRALIKOVA, Ivana (NA secretariat)

LEBERSORGER, Peter (FACE AT)  
LECOCQ, Yves (FACE)  
NAGYOS, Christoph  
PIWERNETZ, Dieter (F&T Magazine)  
POELLOT, Peter (VBB, Nürnberg)  
STEFFENS, Werner (DFV)  
Von WÜLFING, Goddert (FACE DE)

**Assistants**

WANKER, Stephanie (RÜBIG)  
FORSTNER, Dietmar (SCHIERHUBER)  
PASCAL, Allison (MATHIEU)

RACKL, Heidi (DESS)  
RICH, Katia (HELMER)  
TOSO, Alberto (BRAGHETTO)

**Secretariat**

von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)  
MARGHELIS, Alexandre (ELO)



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## **1. Introduction and opening remarks**

The President of the Intergroup, Dr. M. EBNER opened the session by welcoming the chairman, the representatives of several European Foundations<sup>1</sup>, the participants and speakers. He added that the Foundation topic will be given further attention in the future. Chairman Albert DESS animated the debate of this particular session.

## **2. Cormorant population and problems faced by fisheries and fishing ponds managers**

Dr. D. PIWERNETZ gave a picture of the current situation of the cormorant's population. Until 1970, only one domestic species of cormorants could be found in Europe: the Atlantic coast one (*Phalacrocorax Carbo Carbo*). It only occasionally visited shores or inland waters but no fisheries species were jeopardized. Subsequently, a new continental cormorant species (*Phalacrocorax Carbo Carbo Sinensis*) migrated from the east Eurasian landmass into Europe. This Asiatic subspecies was first reported only in small numbers. Despite the lack of comprehensive statistics, about 9,500 cormorants, of which 6,500 were of the domestic form, were reported in countries like Germany, the Netherlands Poland. Within a decade, the population doubled to 19,160 individuals and the continental species had conquered Swedish shores. From 1990 and beyond there was a mass increase extending to 16 European countries (150,000 breeding pairs in the mid 1990s). Between 1970 to 2000 the cormorant's population was estimated to have increased 23fold. A western (200,000 breeding pairs) and an eastern (364,000 breeding pairs) version of the *carbo sinensis* were identified. By the year 2000 there were 1.7 millions individuals of the continental species in Europe whereas 480,000 of the Atlantic species were reported, a total of 2 millions individuals.

He observed that, as the outbreak of new colonies is currently being observed, considerable manpower, time and costs are being invested to monitor this development. Cormorant stocks continue to multiply exponentially as the continental species has no natural predators in the lakes ponds and rivers and has access to ample feeding material thus creating the conditions for this vigorous, adaptable and mobile bird species to develop. The *carbo sinensis* is an opportunist: once it has picked everything clean in one place, it moves in swarms to seek smaller water bodies while smaller colonies follow the wake of larger colonies.

Dr. D. PIWERNETZ regretted that research projects on cormorants initiated so far have proved insufficient. In 2002, The EU sponsored the REDCAFE project but without any unequivocal results: the 2005 report on the project was contested by renowned scientists

<sup>1</sup> Il Nibbio European Foundation, Wildlife and Habitat Foundation, Saint-Hubert Foundation, ELO Water Habitat Fund



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questioning the methodology and the inaccurate construing of the results. A further study, INTERCAFE, did not produce better results.

In consequence, he suggested that in order to support the extremely threatened fish species, to sustain biodiversity, to keep the small artisanal fish ponds going and to secure jobs, several millions of euros should be invested in the fisheries industry. In order to offset the unsustainable damage from cormorants together, he called for an effective European cormorant management system with perhaps the setting up of a European compensation fund.

### **3. The cormorant's overpopulation problem in Germany**

Dr. P. BRECKLING briefly presented the German Fishing Organisation representing commercial, professional and hobby fishing, regrouping several million members across Germany. He said that the cormorants should not be seen only as a problem but also as a success story when it comes to protecting the environment. However, whereas the protection has been successful for the cormorant itself, a number of businesses have gone out of due to its overpopulation. He explained that a number of measures tried out have not proved successful. Indeed, although permits to cheat cormorants locally, where damage is being caused, has allowed some pond fisheries managers to stabilize their situation, this type of measure is particularly constraining and thus no longer efficient beyond a certain number of birds. It is not manageable for all pond managers to allocate too much time and energy in chasing away birds.

Dr. P. BRECKLING deplored the fact that the EU and Member States decline their respective responsibilities in tackling the problem. The EU Commission maintains it has provided Member States with all the means to ensure they can take action but Member States reply they are bound by "Europe" to keep on providing protection to the cormorants; as a result, businesses continue suffering damages caused by cormorants.

In addition to losses endured by businesses, he observed that there is now a problem in terms of protecting endangered species of fish. Some species have already disappeared from certain areas because of cormorants. Arguing that cormorants no longer require protection, Dr. P. BRECKLING suggested that the Commission should propose to the Council their inclusion on the list of species that need to be combated. Local measures, he said, only produce a local level limited effect and the entire German Fishing Association is therefore calling for the introduction of a European management plan which would aim at cutting cormorant population by half. Pointing out that the cormorant does not take any notice of borders, he concluded that we should move from protection to stock management by setting objectives.



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#### **4. The cormorant issue in Ireland**

C. KEANE presented the Irish landowners' point of view on predation of salmon by cormorants. He said he had been personally involved in a successful campaign aiming at persuading the Irish government, with EU support, to end drift netting for salmon at sea.

He explained that, in Irish rivers, large quantities of young salmon were eaten before they ever reached the sea to begin their long journey across the Atlantic. Failing to solve the problem at Member State level, a request to organise a cull of cormorants in order to have their stomachs analysed has proved fruitless. C. KEANE observed that the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) was recently requested by several organisations to give a licence to cull cormorants. It was pointed out that, in 2007, the Irish Government had launched a hardship scheme costing the taxpayer €30 million to prevent an interceptory mixed stock fishery continuing.

He further explained that one major salmon river is estimated to host 800 birds, that cormorants were well above their conservation limit and were having a seriously adverse impact on a more threatened species, the Salmon. Considering that each cormorant eats approximately 0.8 kg of fish per day according to studies this Irish river is losing 640 kg of fish daily (800 x 0.8) to cormorants. Considering also that during the spring season these are largely juvenile salmon consumed by cormorants, this implies a vast number of fish are lost to a single predator species. C. KEANE disapproved that no permission has been given even to carry out a scientific study on the stomach contents of a limited number of birds.

As predator pressure is now putting global biodiversity at risk, he warned that biodiversity conservation objectives will not be reached if no concrete solutions are found. He urged for a better implementation of the Birds Directive and a recognition of biological specificities of species coupled with the prevalence of common sense in tackling the problem. C. KEANE finally expressed the need to have clear guidelines from the Commission so that the common concerns of Member States are adequately answered.

#### **5. The effect of cormorants on rivers, lakes and ponds**

Dr. W. STEFFENS acknowledge the existence of approximately 2 million cormorants in Europe and said that assuming they each eat a daily 500 grams of fish this amounts to 3,000 tonnes daily. Similarly, 172,000 cormorants in Germany inflict a loss of 23,000 tonnes of fish a year.

First he explained that whereas large rivers are less affected, medium and small rivers are heavily threatened, in particular trout rivers. As a result, angling is severely impacted, with a



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number of cultural and sociological implications. He identified certain regions like Thüringen or Northern Westphalia as well as areas in Austria as facing very serious biomass losses of fish reaching 40 to 90% of stocks in some areas. The fact that young fish are particularly susceptible leads to the loss of a large amount of genetic diversity in rivers, several of which are located in protected areas. Furthermore, cormorants are increasingly turning up in urban areas without being scared of man any longer.

With regard to lakes, the decrease of fish stocks in larger lakes due to cormorants implies a substantial deal of economic impact for professional fishermen and anglers. An illustration of this is that, in Lower Saxony (Northern Germany), cormorants are reported to eat as many fish as a fisherman can catch in one year. In other regions, where a yield of eel once used to be of 5000-6000 kg has now come down to 100-200 kg.

As regards ponds, Dr. W. STEFFENS observed that the pond trout likes to rest in small ponds but all the young fish are being consumed by cormorants inflicting serious damages to the stocks. In the Netherlands, some pond fisheries have completely given up their activity due to the damages. In Germany, cormorants are the main reason of the losses of fish in pond fisheries. Eels are particularly under threat and carp pond fisheries are suffering.

Likewise, the Baltic Sea's coastal waters are not spared. Cormorants eat young cods and salmon going down the rivers, undermining salmon conservation efforts.

Dr. W. STEFFENS also mentioned a knock-on effect due to stress in fish stocks which very often causes further deaths of fish. This aggravates the already serious ecological damage in most water bodies.

The Cormorant regulations experienced in Germany have been found to cause excessive regulatory red tape for fishermen, as they are very time consuming and costly. In addition it is not realistic to expect pond managers to chase all the cormorants approaching their areas. Furthermore, most initiatives consist in moving the predatory birds to another area, thus only displacing the problem. In larger bodies of water it is particularly difficult to protect fish from cormorants and e.g. in Bavaria, in spite of catching several thousands birds a year, the population remains constant. Cormorants are being found in unexpected regions, making it very difficult to plan protection of fisheries.

In conclusion regional and national measures can only make a very small contribution to limiting damages caused by cormorants, without solving the problem overall. REDCAFE and INTERCAFE projects have also been unable to solve the problem. Incidentally, it will be very difficult to reach the EU water directive objectives unless the population of cormorants is managed so as to be drastically reduced. Dr. W. STEFFENS called for a Europe wide cormorant management programme to avoid serious long term damage on fish stocks and fisheries. He said that Austria and Germany have come up with concrete proposals already.



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He explained that the cormorant population needs to be reduced by 50 %. A suitable way of achieving this goal would be to include the cormorant into Annex II of the Birds Directive, listing the species which may be hunted. The landscape and the land's biological balance have to be protected, he concluded.

## 6. Debate and discussion

MEP P. BACO explained his personal involvement in this issue as the Slovak Fishing Association asked for assistance and lodged a petition to this effect at the European Parliament. The petition is supported by the relevant associations of Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary. It urges for a common European management of cormorant regulation at EU level in order to level the differential approaches of Member States in the application of derogations as provided for in the Birds Directive. The petition demands the placement of the Great cormorant currently listed under Article 9 in the Annex II of the directive as an adequate and the most effective solution to the current situation. He enquired about the expected feedback and the next procedures of the implementation of today's declaration. He then proposed himself for cooperation in this issue.

MEP L. EK stated that Sweden faces severe problems on the eastern coast of Stockholm and that cormorants are now spreading into the Swedish and Finnish Archipelago. She added that in the Archipelago on the Eastern coast of Sweden, a group of protected islands where humans are not allowed to set foot until late July because of the population of rare bird species such as Orchids, every single tree is inhabited by cormorants and it only takes one or two years for the flora of the island to be completely burnt out. While the island turns black and white, the strict Swedish regulations for the preservation of birds and flowers on these islands do not allow any intervention. Mrs. EK welcomed the resolution's text as very balanced and good but she observed that the brief mention to Natura 2000 areas could have been further emphasised. She also wished to find a means to spread some information about the aspect of these islands following the passage of cormorants.

MEP A. KELEMEN mentioned the problems faced in the Danube Delta, a privileged area for the proliferation not only of a large number of cormorants but also of about 150 species of fishing birds such as Pelicans and Geese. He said the populations of the Delta area complain about the excessive protection status enjoyed by all these predatory bird species and he warned that the cormorant phenomenon could well be replicated with other species of fish predators, with a possible spreading in neighbouring countries. He said the Delta's economy has been based on fisheries for several centuries and an overprotection of fishing birds could put the local population's activities at threat.



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MEP J. KOHLÍČEK mentioned that the Czech Republic is not spared by the damages caused by cormorants but also by other bird species. He expressed the necessity to drastically diminish the population of these birds as a condition to the preservation of wild life. As cormorants in particular are coming from Sweden, the problem deserves a joint response. It would be unwise to breed certain fish species whilst allowing the Cormorant population to reproduce in leaps and bounds causing the devastation of the countryside in the Czech Republic. He also underlined the difficulty to conciliate measures taken in this context with the rules applying in Natura 2000 areas, which cover about 30 % of the Czech territory.

MEP A. SCHIERHUBER stated that in Austria political values have always incorporated sustainable development and biodiversity protection. She acknowledged the enormous difficulties faced by pond management industries with often bankruptcy as a result. Cormorants totally overfish the rivers' populations, picking everything clean. She added that it is incumbent upon us to preserve flora and fauna intact in the citizen's interest by taking action swiftly and managing resources with care. She welcomed the Intergroup's resolution and called for its enforcement.

A German participant from West Pomerania stated the problem has been going on since the reunification of Germany when only 2000 or 3000 breeding pairs existed. Describing the current situation as poor, he urged to meet together again to decide of a common line to adopt with a view to prompt the authorities to take active and vigorous measures.

Mr. von Wülfing, a representative of the German Hunting Association, agreed with the accurate description of the problem, ascertaining that a cross regional rather than a mere regional approach should be adopted to resolve the situation. He stated that hunting alone is unable to provide for a comprehensive answer. He expressed the preparedness of German hunters to contribute but suggested that tackling breeding colonies first involved an egg stocks management. He called upon the Commission to loosen up the rules.

**7. Any other business**

No other topics were raised.

**8. Conclusion**

MEP A. DESS summarised the meeting by first thanking all experts and participants. He said that obviously the problem is genuinely pan European and cannot be resolved nationally alone but only at EU level. He pointed out that under the nature protection schemes there needs to be some scope for action and that a solution has to be found to tackle the problem within the 30 % of protected areas under Natura 2000. He said nature protection activists should show understanding to the actual heavy damages inflicted to nature managers. Reactions from



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prejudiced citizens cannot be ignored. He called for some arrangement to be reached and swift action to resolve the situation.

He finally said that any amendments to the declaration should be tabled in the President MEP Dr. M. EBNER's office by Wednesday 30 May 2007, date after which the text should be considered as fully adopted.

MEP Dr. M. EBNER announced that a meeting of the Intergroup's *Bureau* would take place on 7 June 2007.