

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002621/24
to the Commission
Anna Maria Cisint (PfE), Aldo Patriciello (PfE)
(21 November 2024)

Subject: Request to amend the protection regime for cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) in Directive 79/409/EEC

The impact cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) are having on fish populations and wetland ecosystems has dramatically worsened. In Italy, the population is continuously growing and has started to spread to high altitude areas along water courses and alpine lakes. Running extensive organic fish farms in Italian lagoons is no longer financially viable. A number of fish species of high environmental value, such as the very rare grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) and eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), are also suffering as a result. The risk of triggering infringement proceedings discourages local administrations in the Member States from making use of derogations that allow culling in extraordinary circumstances, which are therefore not applied, or applied haphazardly, and in any case insufficiently. The situation is compounded by bureaucratic delays and ideological battles of certain groups to the detriment of biodiversity, while the environmental damage continues to increase. Decisive action urgently needs to be taken from a regulatory point of view. The victims are the very biodiversity that we are so keen to preserve, as well as a very important part of the fisheries sector.

In light of the above:

1. What legislative action will the Commission take to address the impact of cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and when?
2. Would it be possible to amend the Birds Directive, specifically the section on the protection of the species from Annex I to Annex III, to authorise Member States to hunt these birds?

Submitted: 21.11.2024

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(14 January 2025)

1. The Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*) like all naturally occurring birds in the wild state in the EU, is protected under the Birds Directive⁽¹⁾. There is no specific EU legislation on cormorants nor any plans to develop such legislation. The Commission is aware of the significant increase of the European cormorant population in the last decades, which can make balancing conflicts between human interests and cormorants at local level challenging at times. To support national authorities the Commission has published information on preventing and managing these conflicts⁽²⁾. A broader guidance on the application of Article 5 and 9 of the directive is also under development.

2. The Great Cormorant was removed from Annex I of the directive in 1997 in light of the recovery of the population. Regarding authorising Member States to hunt the cormorant, Annex II of the Birds Directive is rather linked to recreational hunting and is not the appropriate tool to address conflicts of cormorants with fisheries. In consequence, it is neither appropriate to add the cormorant in Annex III of the directive which relates to the authorisation of the sale of specimen, as the cormorant is of little commercial interest. The derogation system under the directive already provides the necessary flexibility to Member States to address this problem. Provided that the species conservation status is not at risk and there are no alternatives, it is possible to take a certain number of cormorants under a derogation, e.g. to protect fish farming from serious damage. In any case, even if the cormorant was listed in Annex II of the directive, there would be an obligation to respect hunting periods and the need for derogations would remain, e.g. during reproduction periods.

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7-25.

⁽²⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/birds-directive_en