



Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Fischereiverbände der Alpenländer

ARGEFA c/o LfV Bayern e.V.

Pechdellerstr.16

81545 München

Telefon: (089) 64 27 26 - 0

Telefax: (089) 64 27 26 - 66

Internet: <http://www.lfvbayern.de>

e-Mail: poststelle@lfvbayern.de

Bank: Münchner Bank e.G,
BLZ 701 900 00, Kto-Nr. 2825 635

Bearbeiter: Hanfland, Tel. -26

e-Mail: sebastian.hanfland@lfvbayern.de

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Preventing excessive damage by cormorants on fish

This resolution is dedicated to the attention of politicians and governmental authorities of alpine countries in the EU, to the EU commission and to the European parliament.

The ARGEFA and its national associations, representing more than 500.000 members, observe a strong increase of cormorant populations in Europe which devastate characteristic fish populations of the Alps. Cormorant numbers in Europe have amounted to a historical record. Other than fish that are predated by the cormorant and are now declining, the cormorant is not an endangered species and, since roughly three decades, the number of new breeding colonies it establishes in previously unaffected areas increases dramatically. Today, between 15.000 and 20.000 cormorants inhabit the alpine region in winter, and estimates on their fish uptake range between 1.400 and 1.800 tons per year, not to mention numerous injured or died fish. The economic and ecologic damage cormorants cause to creeks, rivers, lakes and aquaculture is enormous.

Cormorants are certainly not the only factor which causes fish populations to decline. Since hydropower facilities and other anthropogenic effects have already reduced fish populations, their natural reproduction cannot compensate the predation by cormorants. Fishing economy, anglers and fisheries agencies spend millions of Euros each year, for example on restoration projects and fish stocking, in order to minimize the harm and to support natural aquatic biocoenoses.

Moreover, fishing policies are subject to extensive legal restrictions, many of them set voluntarily by fisheries. However, these efforts to maintain or re-establish endangered fish species become absurd in view of uncontrolled cormorant populations.

The alpinous region with its summercold and clear streams is home to endemic fish and other fish that are of conservational and ecological interest. All these species are listed as highly endangered or at risk of extinction.



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Evolved as a marine waterbird with excellent diving capabilities, the cormorant is an extremely successful predator in the clear waters of the Alps. It is well documented that the annual population peak of cormorant coincides with the spawning time of most fish (Sept. until June). Spawning fish are an even easier catch, since they concentrate in shallow water. As mentioned above, the naturally low reproduction rates of alpine fish species do not suffice to compensate for losses by cormorants.

The measures and the legal framework to protect fish from increasing cormorant populations differ among alpine countries. In most cases, they are too restrictive and limited to uncoordinated, mostly regionally measures to scare off these birds. However, such strategies mitigate only locally the damage on aquaculture and free waters. For sustainable protection of endangered fish and fisheries, we need to reduce breeding populations along Europe's coasts and a coordinated management by EU members.

The destruction of cormorant eggs is a rarely applied method in the EU. According to the EU commission, only a marginal fraction of the total cormorant population is removed by shooting adult birds. It is obvious that larger interventions are needed to reduce the damage on fisheries and ecology – alike, for example, the management of deer and wild boar which is common practice to support natural reforestation.

Based on these arguments, the associated ARGEFA members appeal to their countries, the EU parliament and the European Commission to take efforts to:

- ✓ List the cormorant in appendix II of the EU Birds Directive (hunnable animals)
- ✓ enhance regional legal frameworks to scare off comorants and make measures more effective
- ✓ reduce cormorants in a sustainable manner (in addition to local scaring off) for the protection of fish biocoenoses
- ✓ continue and intensify population-controlling interventions in cormorant breeding colonies
- ✓ start a European-wide management of cormorant populations within short time
- ✓ establish a coordinated long-term management plan that integrates the cormorant as part of our environment, without compromising aims for the biodiversity of fish species.

Kitzbühel the 14.th of December

The Presidents

M. Braun



Landesfischereiverband
Bayern

G. Biedermann



Fischereiverband
Liechtenstein

Dr. E. Stock



Österreichischer
Fischereiverband

R. Seiler



Schweizerischer
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B. Jerse



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