

# Aquaculture Advisory Council

26 February 2026



## Framework for a European Management Plan

### for the Great Cormorant

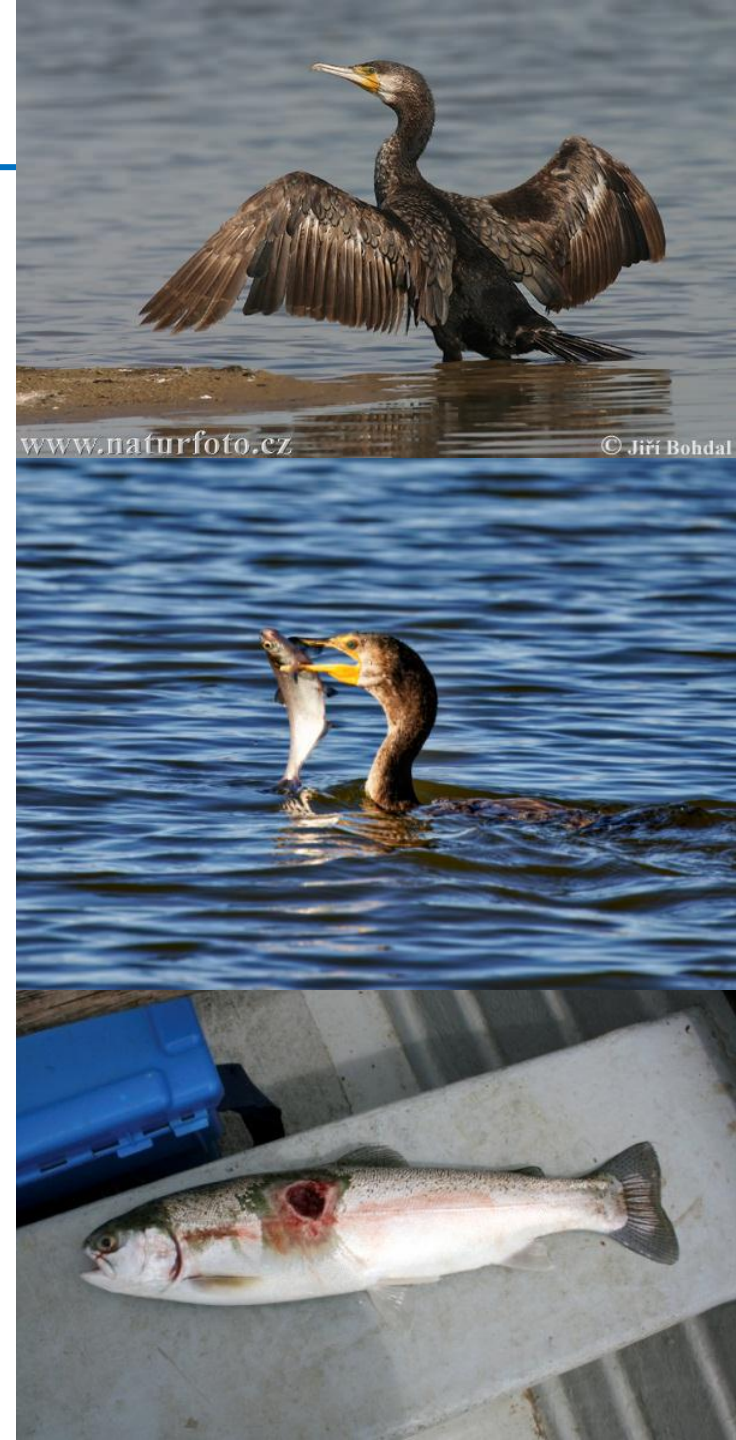
Ian G. Cowx

Niels Jepsen & Raymon Van Anrooy



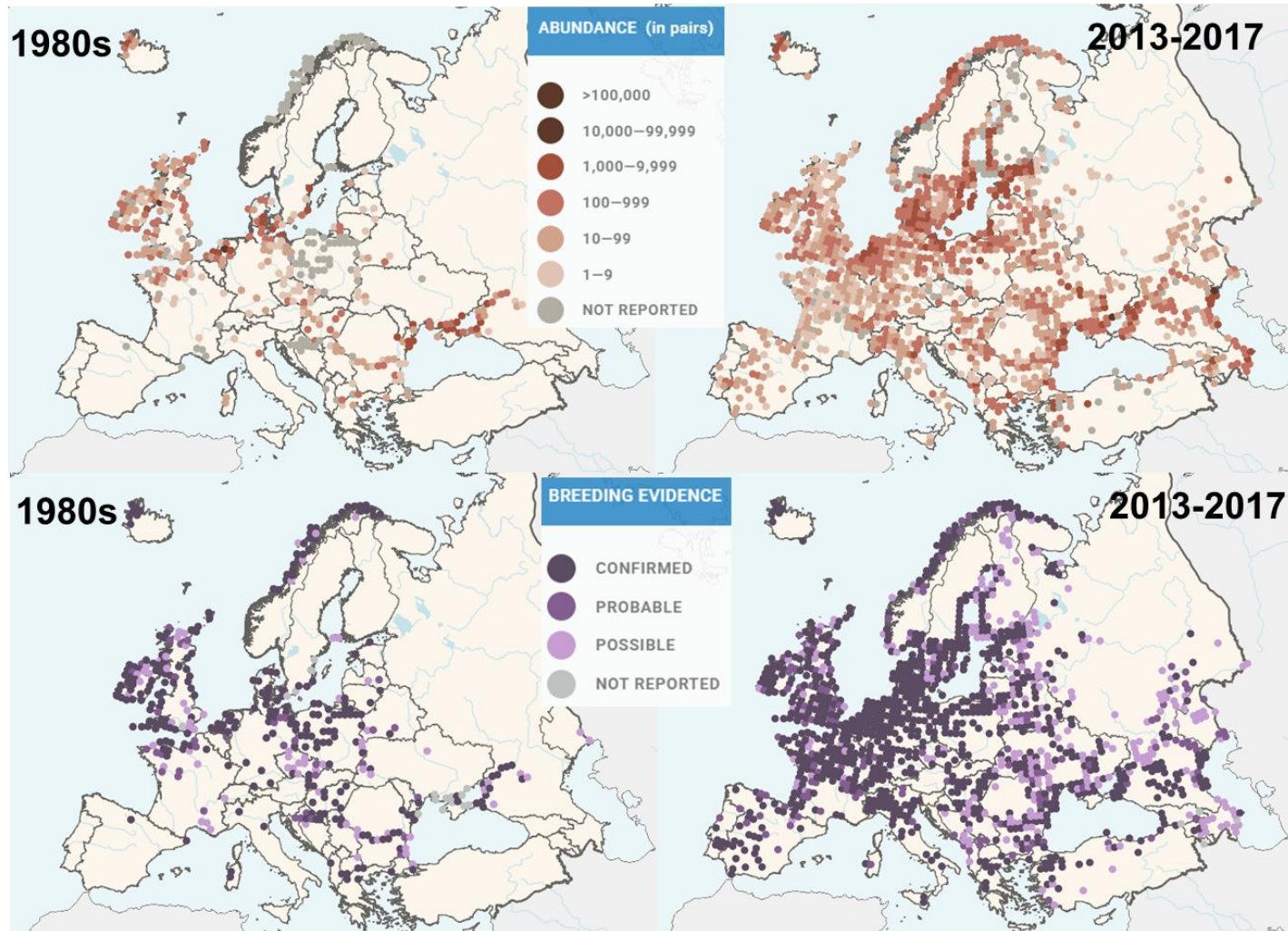
# Outline

- Nature of the conflict
- Ongoing actions to resolve impact of piscivorous birds on fish stocks
- Framework of management plan
- Proposed adaptive management strategy



# Nature of the conflict: Distribution and abundance of birds

Increasing numbers of breeding and overwintering great cormorants creating **conflict between bird conservation and fisheries and aquaculture**

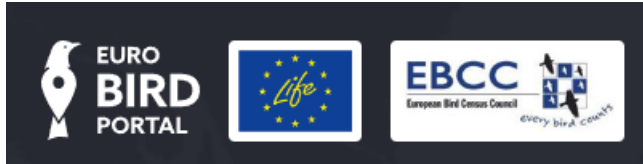


No European-wide cormorant count since 2013

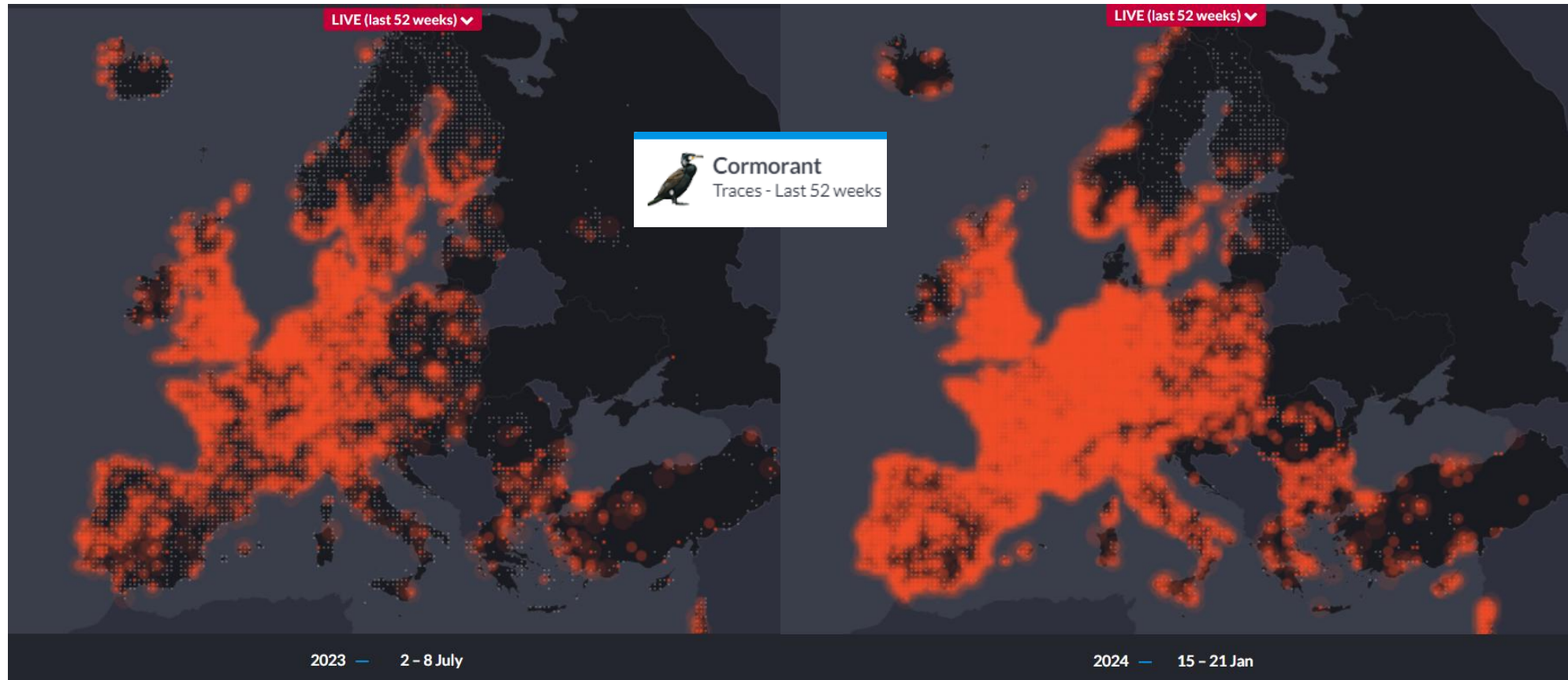
Current estimate around 2 million cormorants

Populations expanding further south and west over time

# Nature of the conflict: Distribution and abundance of birds



<https://eurobirdportal.org/ebp/en/#home/PHACAR/r52weeks>

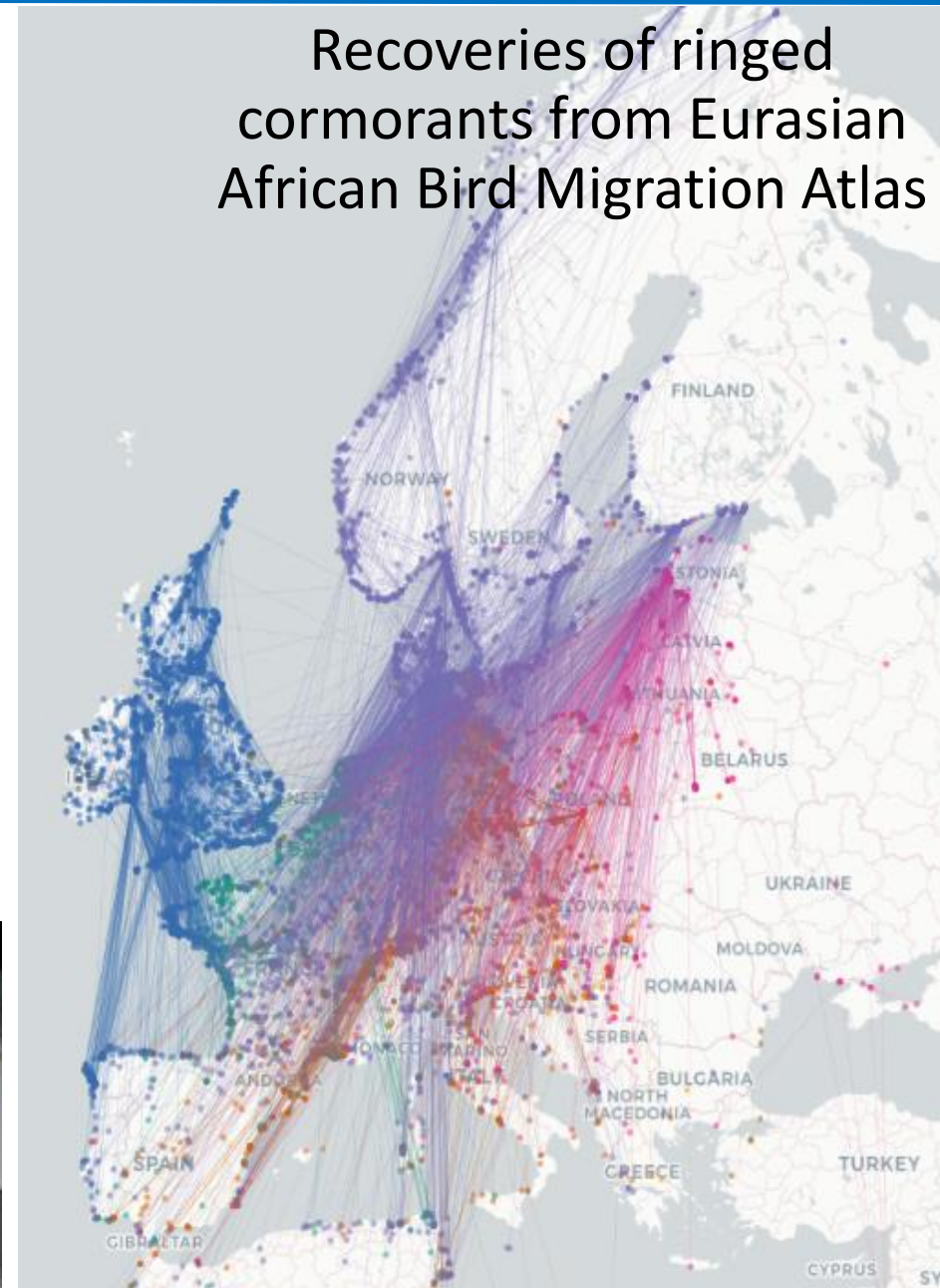


Summer

Winter

# Nature of the conflict - Distribution and abundance of birds

- Great cormorant highly mobile species
- Can move 100s of kilometres between breeding and wintering colonies
- Cormorants consume **440-1100 g/day/bird**
- Plus scaring and wounding of fish
- Cause considerable reduction of fish stocks in coastal and inland waters
- Depredation and economic loss at fish farms
- Aggregations of birds in nesting and overwintering colonies bring about ecosystem effects



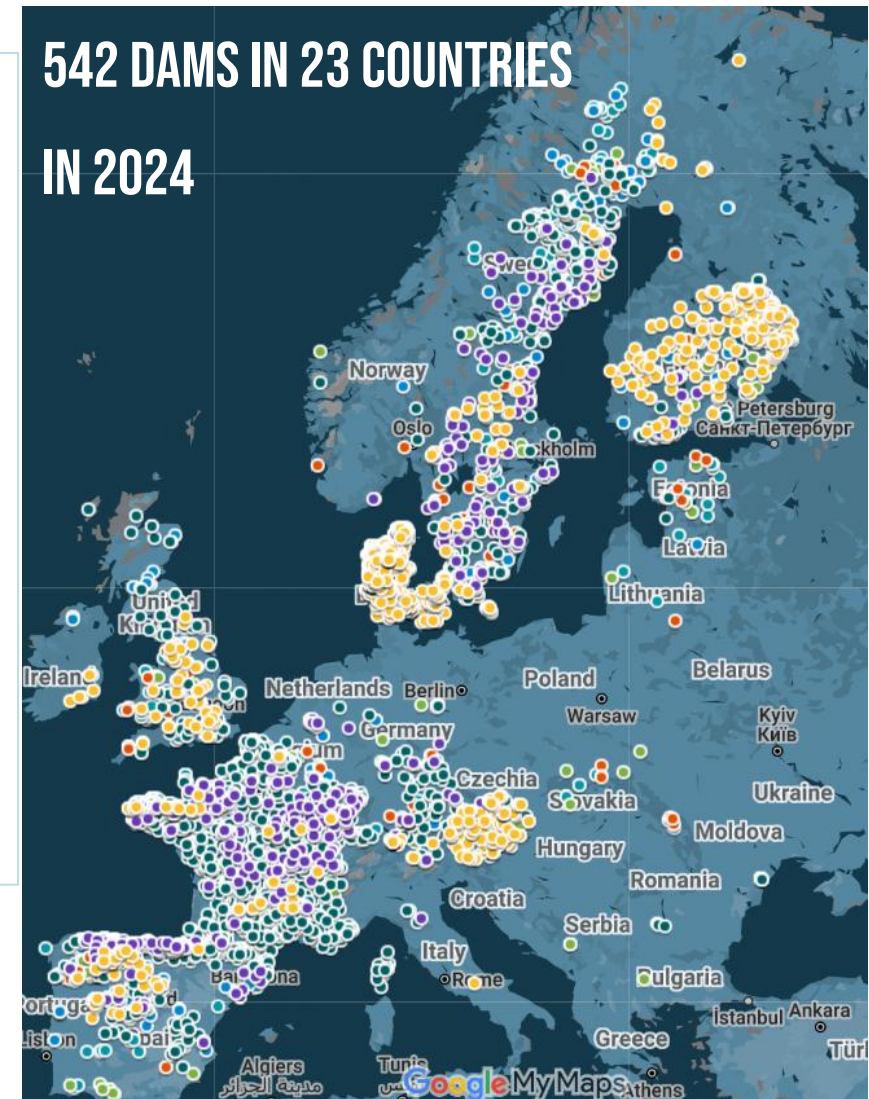
# Nature of the conflict: economic impact

- Cause considerable reduction of fish stocks in coastal and inland waters attributed to cormorant predation
  - Cormorant population in Europe (estimated  $\pm 2$  million birds) consumes **approx. 300 000 000 kg of fish per year**
  - Estimated annual costs of cormorant predation to recreational fishing in Europe are **> 100 million euro.**  
[preliminary conservative estimate from ongoing EIFAAC, EAA, FEAP research]
- Depredation and economic loss at fish farms
  - Estimated total predation costs to aquaculture in Europe **> € 250 million**



# Nature of the conflict: status for fish populations

- Despite considerable efforts to improve **wild fish populations** through management of exploitation and habitat improvement many **remain threatened and failing** favourable conservation status (HD and WFD)
- European Parliament (2008) adopted a Resolution (P6\_TA(2008)0583) towards a **European Cormorant Management Plan** to minimise increasing impact but **requires procedures that are widely accepted by all stakeholders** to resolve conflicts.



**DAM REMOVAL EUROPE MAP**

# Nature of the conflict: Current management of great cormorant

- Cormorants protected under Birds Directive, **Article 5** (not huntable species).
- Cormorants **conservation status - Favourable**
- **Article 9** allows derogations from general protection regime of the Birds Directive to take necessary actions, including lethal control, to prevent serious damage to fisheries and aquaculture.



Robert Gwiazda  
IOP PAN

# Current management of birds on fish stocks

## Management measures – INTERCAFE TOOLBOX (Russell et al. 2012)

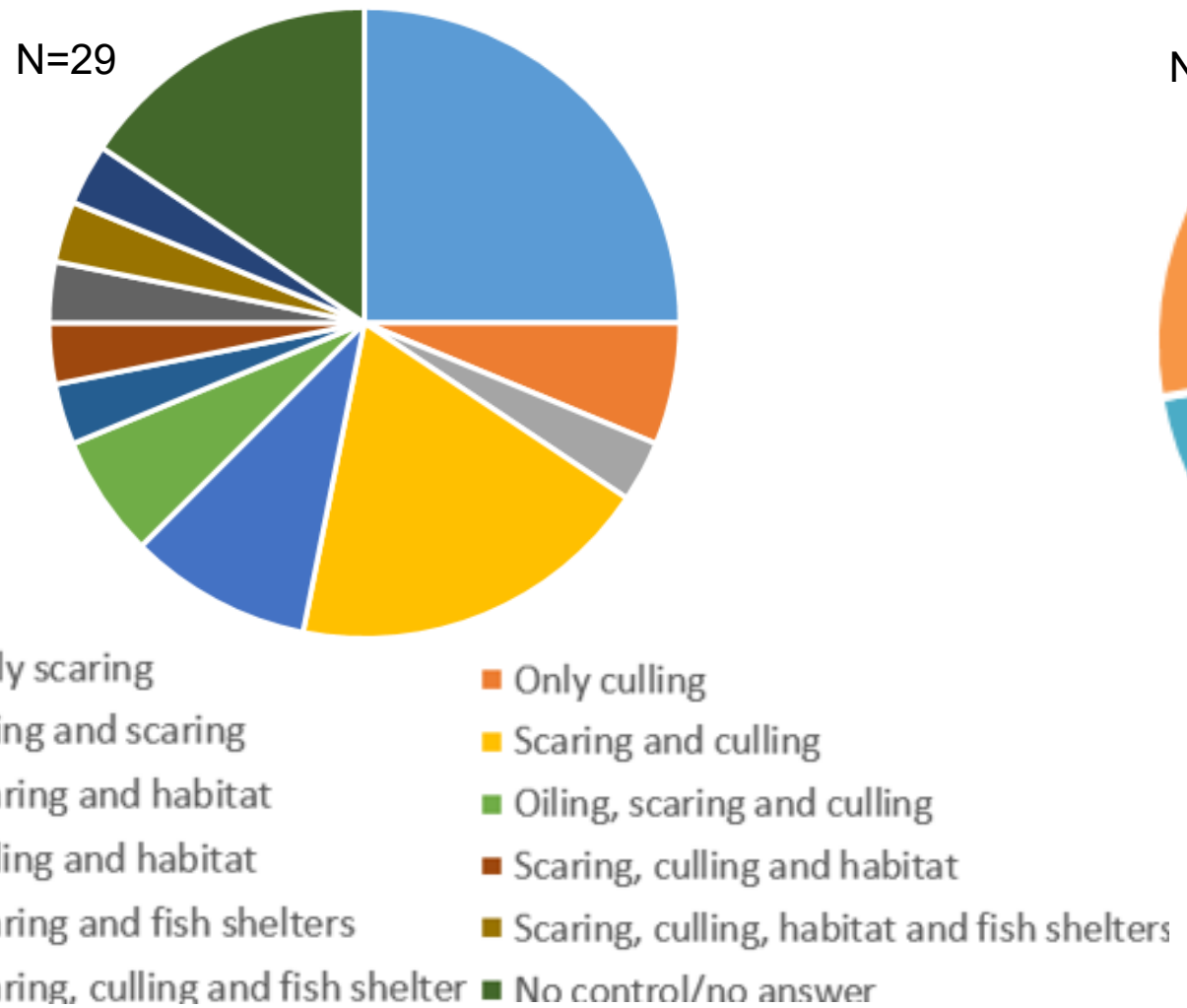
- Lethal measures to reduce cormorant numbers;
- Reducing reproductive success through egg destruction;
- Scaring cormorants from fishery or fish farm;
- Exclusion techniques;
- Habitat modification to reduce availability of fish to cormorants;
- Fish stock management to reduce availability of fish to cormorants;
- Compensation;
- Management plans.

Tools reaffirmed under Aquaculture Assistance  
Mechanism workshop January 2026

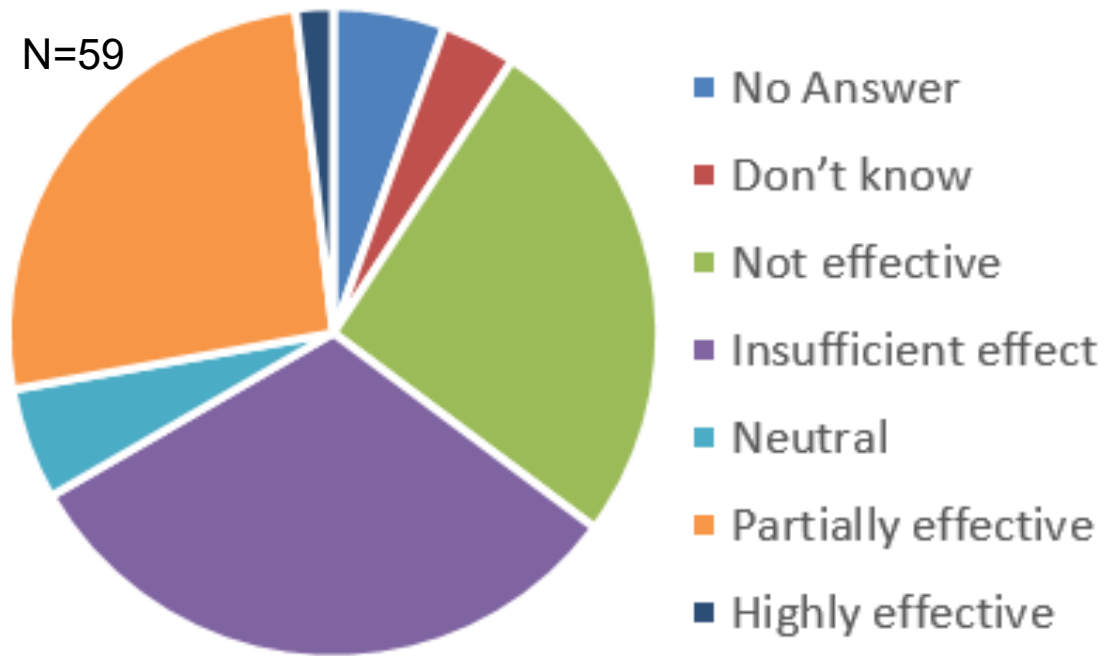


# Efficacy of current cormorant control measures - EIFAAC survey

Primary cormorant control measures used (%)



Effectiveness of cormorant control measures used (%)



**Issue:**  
**Control measures largely considered ineffective**

# Current control of cormorant predation on fish stocks

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## Control actions against cormorants in Europe: ISSUES

- Most countries do not apply for Article 9 licences
- Control under Article 9 not endorsed by all management organizations and stakeholders
  - Argue no legal possibility under the Birds Directive for binding EU wide framework obliging MS to reduce cormorant populations
- Control of cormorant populations largely ineffective at local scale
  - **needs regional / pan European intervention and must include inland and coastal populations**

# European Management Plan

## Overall Goal:

***To achieve a fair balance between pan-European conservation of the great cormorant, with the sustainable use and protection of fish populations, fisheries and aquaculture interests, including the socio-economic well-being of communities dependent on fisheries and aquaculture.***



# Components for European Management Plan: Guiding Principles

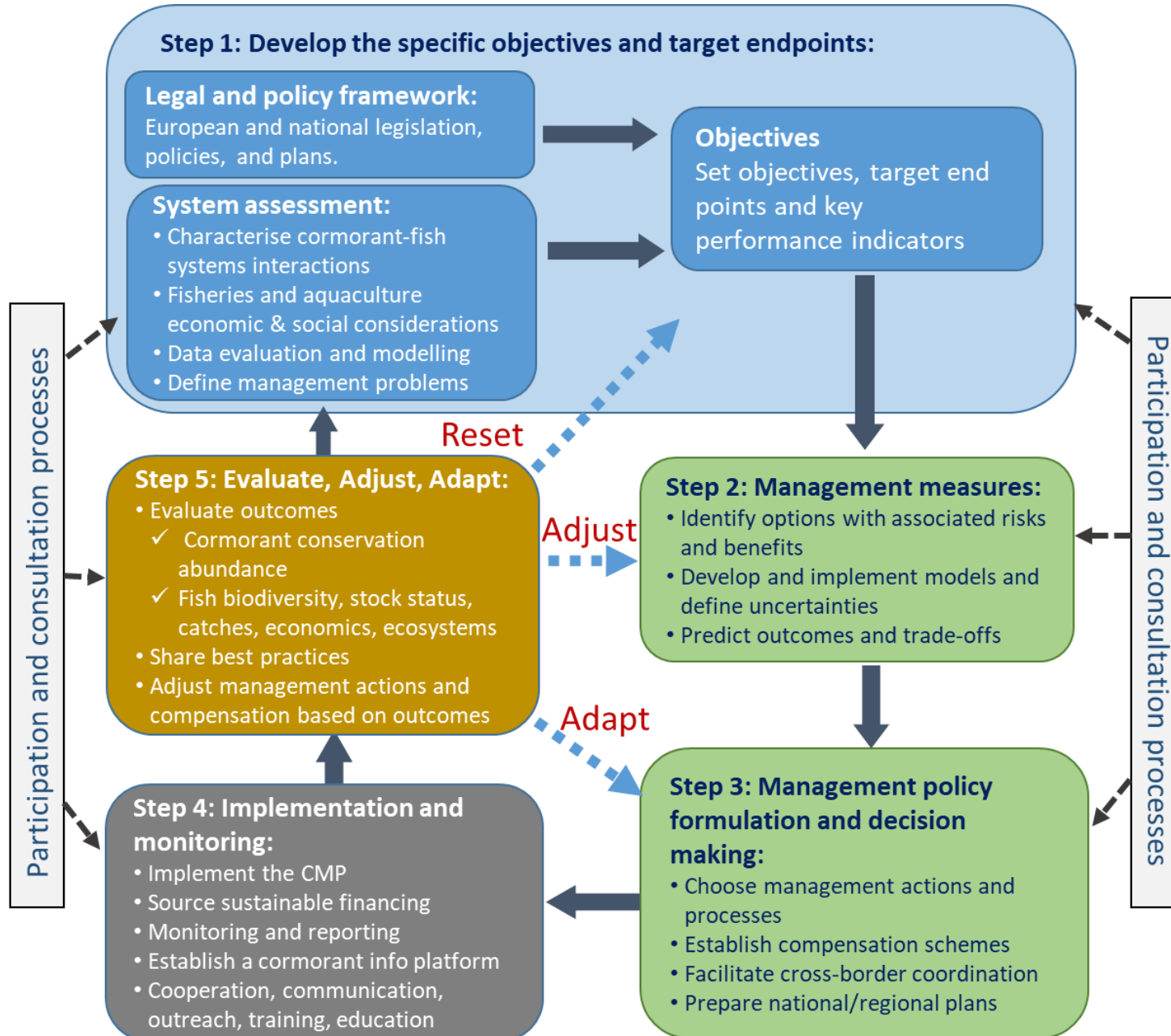
<b>Sustainability</b>	Ensure long-term coexistence of cormorants, fish populations and livelihoods.
<b>Evidence-based management</b>	Base decisions on robust scientific data.
<b>Adaptive management</b>	Use flexible and dynamic approaches to address evolving challenges, incorporating regular monitoring and stakeholder feedback.
<b>Collaboration and coordination</b>	Promote cooperation and continuous dialogue among European country agencies, NGOs and CSOs
<b>Compliance with legal frameworks</b>	Align management actions with EU directives and international treaties.
<b>Minimize conflicts</b>	Balance needs of birds, fisheries, aquaculture, biodiversity conservation.
<b>Precautionary approach</b>	Address potential risks proactively, avoiding unintended ecological or economic harm.
<b>Environmental stewardship</b>	Conduct management interventions in a responsible manner with care for the environment

# Components for a European Management Plan: OBJECTIVES

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1. Maintain **up-to-date status and trend data** on cormorants, inland and coastal fisheries and aquaculture.
2. Improve understanding, documentation and **quantification of ecological, economic and social impacts of cormorants** on inland and coastal waters
3. Provide a plan of action to **protect vulnerable fish species against predation** by cormorants, contributing to achievement of WFD, HD, Birds Directive and Bern Convention targets
4. Adapt, update and **provide framework to implement measures to reduce and mitigate impact of cormorant predation on fisheries and aquaculture.**
5. Provide **framework to facilitate use of Article 9 derogations to authorise controlled culling of cormorants** whilst maintaining favourable conservation status.
6. Promote **cross-border collaboration** and harmonisation of monitoring, management, policy and legal frameworks.
7. Provide a central, **open-access, fully moderated platform** for engagement with all key stakeholders.

# Pan-European cormorant–fish management plan: Framework



- Adopts the project management cycle
- Process driven based on best available information
- Adopts best available management actions and processes to resolve conflicts
- Adaptive, based on **Evaluate, Adjust and Adapt** procedure
- Stakeholder participation and consultation at all stages

# Components for a European Management Plan: Implementation

## Step 4: Implementation and monitoring:

- Implement the CMP
- **Source sustainable financing**
- **Monitoring and reporting**
- **Establish a cormorant info platform**
- Cooperation, communication, outreach, training, education

Implement conflict prevention and mitigation measures, including **non-lethal deterrents, predation thresholds and fish stock resilience**;

Establish and operationalize damage/loss reporting systems, damage assessment and **compensation**;

Information evaluated after **6-year cycle** against current (2025) or previous conditions

Establish and maintain Secretariat that will provide for a **Cormorant Management Platform**.

Facilitate meetings of **Cormorant Management Advisory Group (CMAG)** and Compliance Committee (CC).

**Provide technical support to European countries** for developing national plans, capacity building, awareness raising and legislation review and amendment (as needed).

# Next steps

Dates	Activities	Responsible
Sept 2025 to present	<p>Oct 2025: DGEEnv revised guidelines on Article 9 Derogation of Birds Directive to <b>Nature Directives Sub-expert Group</b></p> <p>Sept 2025: AOB at <b>Agrifish</b> meeting</p> <p>Jan 2026: <b>Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism</b> workshop</p>	DGEEnv and Member countries
Ongoing	<p>March 2026: Presentation to <b>European Parliament</b></p> <p>Member countries and EP to decide on way forward. <b>Options:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Establish Cormorant Management Advisory Group (16 countries have nominated experts) and Compliance Committee (CC)</li><li>- Request further development of framework into pan-European management plan or regional management plans (e.g. at EP, EIFAAC, Bern Convention)</li><li>- Proposal for AEWA single species management plan</li></ul> <p>October 2026: Review and endorsement by <b>EIFAAC 33</b></p>	EP, EIFAAC and Member countries