

5 FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

Financial compensation is used in some countries to offset the consequences of cormorant predation for particular stakeholder groups. Such measures are largely, but not exclusively, restricted to fish farms and hatcheries, with losses of fish consumed by cormorants being covered (though not always fully) by compensatory payments. Where compensation is paid for fish losses to cormorants, the actual loss of fish is seldom, if ever, calculated rigorously. Thus, the relationship between financial payments and the actual fish losses being incurred is usually no more than an estimated guess. This is the result of the inherent difficulties in accurately quantifying the impact of cormorants on fish stocks or catches. In some regions no real attempt is made to quantify fish losses, rather a sum of money is set aside for compensation payments and this is shared (sometimes equally, sometimes not) amongst all legitimate claimants. In some countries it has also been possible to apply for financial aid for the construction of netting enclosures or for scaring programmes.

Many authorities take the view that the cost of managing cormorant conflicts should be borne by the affected stakeholders. Thus, financial compensation arrangements are generally considered inappropriate. In terms of efficacy, the payment of compensation for fish losses will do nothing practical to reduce

other aspects of how cormorant-fisheries conflicts are perceived (e.g. birds will still be eating and/or damaging the fish) and might, arguably, be considered to make the situation worse on the grounds that there might be less incentive for stakeholders to implement any active deterrent measures. There may be a stronger argument, then, for financial support for other measures, such as building enclosures, where such approaches might be realistic. Compensation would undoubtedly be seen as acceptable for some affected stakeholder groups. However, it seems unlikely that such schemes will be adopted widely.

There are active schemes of financial compensation for damage caused by cormorants in several EU countries — Czech Republic, Germany (Saxony), Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Lithuania and Belgium (Wallonia). The compensation schemes and procedures vary, and the authority responsible for this issue may differ — in some countries a central government ministry is responsible whereas in others the responsibility rests with a local authority.

Also, there are differences in the legislation regarding what is eligible for compensation. In some cases, this is available only for fish stocks on fish farms, fish hatcheries and fish breeding and keeping facilities. Further, compensation applies only for dead fish in some

countries, whereas in others compensation is available for injured fish and for the associated expenses (disposal of carcasses, veterinary fees, etc).

Other forms of financial support exist under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), which forms part of the European Common Fisheries Policy. Its objective is to provide for exploitation of living aquatic resources and aquaculture in the context of sustainable development, taking account of environmental, economic and social aspects in a balanced manner. The support is available under the ‘aqua-environmental measures’ and financed by the EU. It is available to every Member State of the European Union in compliance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006.

The ‘aqua-environmental measures’, which apply under Article 30(2)(a) of the EFF, aim to promote aquaculture production methods that are sensitive to environmental and conservation issues; they can also be used to help address cormorant-fishery conflicts. They cover four different types of measures:

- Forms of aquaculture that provide protection and enhancement of the environment.
- Aquaculture operations that participate in EMAS (Community eco-management and audit system).

- Organic aquaculture.
- Sustainable aquaculture compatible with Natura 2000.

Compensation under this scheme may include: costs associated with high or frequent maintenance of farming structures; losses arising from predation by protected wild species (such as cormorants); and loss of revenue due to the requirement to maintain low stock densities (on environmental grounds). Owners of fish pond farms that fulfill certain environmental criteria are eligible for annual payments, per hectare of pond area.

Under Article 29 of the EFF, financial support can be also be provided to aid investment in the purchase of equipment used for protecting fish pond farms from wild predators.

Country Examples

The number of complaints about cormorant damage from fish pond farmers in Latvia fell to zero in 2008 following the adoption (in November 2007) of a compensation scheme by the Latvian Government.

In Saxony, Germany, fish farmers have been paid compensation since 1996 to help maintain and sustainably manage Carp ponds

along traditional lines. In addition, compensation may be provided for especially high damage to fish in fish ponds.

In the Czech Republic fish losses in ponds are calculated by multiplying cormorant numbers and the number of days the birds are present — verified by an independent expert or ornithologist — by an average daily food requirement for each cormorant (500g per day) and the market price of the fish. Compensation is available mostly in the larger fish pond regions located in South Bohemia and South Moravia, and this accounts for up to 85% of the total compensation payments for the whole country.

In Italy, financial compensation for cormorant predation on fish is provided by regional administrations, as it is for damage caused by other protected fauna. When regional administrations delegate this task to provinces (e.g. in Emilia-Romagna), the money is drawn from regional sources and has to be shared by all the provinces in that region. Provinces may have a duty to carry out bird or animal censuses, check for and log complaints and calculate the amount of

compensation that should be provided. Because of financial constraints, reimbursement for the full economic impacts of pest species has been replaced by contributory compensation, where only part of the estimated costs are met. In the case of damage caused by protected species, compensatory payments are provided by the local administration, whereas for game species this duty is performed by the statutory organisations that manage hunting areas at provincial level, using funds derived from hunting licences.

In Slovakia, a compensation scheme has applied since 2002 when a new Nature and Landscape Protection Act came into force. This only relates to damage caused by cormorants at fish rearing and breeding facilities, with compensation payments being provided by the Ministry of Environment. Fish losses are estimated by official experts on a case by case basis. Between 2003 and 2006, 3,696,723 SKK (approximately 122,000 Euro) was paid out, representing around 40% of all the money paid out under compensation schemes for damage caused by protected species (brown bear, wolf, lynx, otter, European bison, beaver and grey heron).