

Impact of cormorants and seals on the Baltic Sea small-scale fisheries: A call for the EU and national decision-makers to take action now

Brussels, 26 May 2021 – On 26 May, **MEP Emma Wiesner** (Sweden, Renew Europe Group) and **MEP Nils Torvalds** (Finland, Renew Europe Group) co-chaired the Baltic Seal and Cormorant Transnational Cooperation project (TNC)'s virtual seminar addressing the impact of seals and cormorants predation on small-scale fisheries.

The dramatic increase of seals and cormorants populations in the Baltic Sea is severely impacting the small-scale fisheries sector, **reducing local catches**, creating additional costs and thus decreasing the profitability for the sector. Moreover, seals inflict **direct damage to fishing gears and spread parasites** that are harmful to fish stocks.

During the webinar, **Esko Taanila, Project Coordinator**, presented the main conclusions of the project which aimed at finding sustainable solutions. He emphasised that fishers live at the sea and take care of their environment. *“They are interested in a sea life balance”*, he added. His presentation was complemented by the testimony of **Timo Matinlassi, a small-scale fisher from North Finland** who explained that *“old fishermen continue fishing only because they cannot do anything else. But the biggest problem is that young fishers do not want to take over and soon there will be no more fresh local fish on the table of Baltic coast households”*.

MEP Nils Torvalds underlined that the Baltic seals and cormorants populations *“are growing in an uncontrolled manner, causing severe ecological, social and economic damage regionally and locally”*. Referring to many small-scale fishers exiting the activity because of years of increasing damages from seals and cormorants, he stated: *“You can rebuild a stock. I am not sure we can rebuild a culture, centuries of artisanal practice of fisheries activities on Baltic coasts”*. **MEP Emma Wiesner** added that ecosystems are fragile. *“We need to make sure that once a species has recovered, we reach a balanced population level that brings benefits for the overall ecosystem, of which fishers and coastal communities are part”*, she said.

Experts from the SLU (Swedish University of Agricultural Science) presented their findings regarding the economic and social direct impacts of seals and cormorants predation on small-scale fisheries as well as some potential mitigations measures. Representatives from the European Commission, **Maja Kirchner, Directorate General for Maritime affairs and Fisheries** and **Micheál O'Briain, Directorate General for Environment**, provided an overview of the European Union policies and legislations, and their implementation in view of conciliating the conservation and biodiversity objectives with the fisheries policy objectives.

The Baltic Sea Seal and Cormorant TNC project's members highlighted that the seals and cormorants predation is sometimes qualified as a “local impact”. It is however **a reality that is shared and endured by all small-scale fishers across the Baltic. A coordinated action at EU level is urgently needed to prevent their disappearance of the Baltic small-scale coastal fisheries.**



Note to the editor:

The **Baltic Sea Seal and Cormorant Transnational Cooperation project** was established in 2017 by fourteen Fishing Local Action Group (FLAG) units from Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Germany to investigate the economic and social impacts of increasing seals and cormorant populations on Baltic small-scale coastal fisheries. The project, funded by the 2014-2020 European Maritime Fisheries Fund, aimed at finding and developing sustainable marine resources management solutions to secure the future of small-scale fisheries in the Baltic Sea area.

Successfully protected by the **Habitats and the Birds Directives**, the Baltic seals and cormorants populations have dramatically increased over the past decades, reaching carrying capacities (maximum population an environment can support) in most regions. However, they have a **significant impact on fish stocks**, thus reducing local catches and the profitability of small-scale coastal fisheries. In addition, the grey seal inflict **direct damage to fishing gears and spread parasites** that are harmful to fish stocks. Predation from cormorants and grey seals constitutes one of the main challenges identified by artisanal fishers to the survival of their sector. It puts at risk the **livelihood of coastal communities** and decreases the provision of fresh local fish to their table.

During the project, 220 fishers were interviewed in six countries between 2018 and 2019. A report was produced by the Finnish Natural Resources Institute (LUKE) to summarize the [results of the survey](#).

As a result of the project and further to the seminar, the Baltic Sea Seal and Cormorant TNC project presents policy recommendations which are attached to this press release.

An extensive report of the event will be available [on the project's website](#) in the coming weeks.

Contact: conference@alienor.eu – [Aliénor](#) supported the project team for the organisation of this online seminar.