

The joint statement below was presented to Environment and Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon MP by Angling Trust chief executive Mark Lloyd on behalf of the Angling Trust, Angling Trades Association, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Avon Roach Project, British Association of Shooting and Conservation, Countryside Alliance, Predation Action Group, Salmon & Trout Association, The Rivers Trust and Wild Trout Trust.

Our organisations urge the Governments of England and Wales to set out a national management plan to reduce the impact of cormorants and goosanders to protect fish stocks as part of healthy aquatic ecosystems and to preserve the social and economic value of fisheries. This national management plan should include adding cormorants and goosanders to the general licence to allow fishery and wildlife managers to protect their fish stocks, along with a wide range of lethal and non-lethal methods of impact mitigation.

The current licensing system is over-bureaucratic, expensive and fails to enable fishery managers to take proportionate action to protect fish stocks. Fisheries are typically granted licences to shoot to scare a fraction of the birds present on their fisheries, after a lengthy application process. Making this change would cut red tape in line with the Government's objectives and would bring England & Wales' management regimes into line with continental neighbours such as France.

We do not take this position lightly, but we do so on the basis of clear evidence that these two species have grown, and continue to grow to unsustainable population numbers; overwintering cormorants have increased from around 2,000 in the early eighties to nearly 25,000 in recent years. Cormorants eat over 1lb of fish in a day. In many rivers, silver fish populations are only able to survive in numbers in town centre locations where cormorants and goosanders are fewer in number.

We do so also because fish stocks are already under threat from a range of pressures, including over-abstraction, pollution and habitat damage, which collectively reduce fish populations' capacity to regenerate. Freshwater aquatic environments are severely degraded and highly managed and that context justifies much more intensive management of these piscivorous birds.

Currently, 60% of rivers in this country are failing the EU Water Framework Directive's requirement to reach good ecological status by 2015, largely because fish stocks are so low. Many of our organisations have programmes of work to improve the condition of the water environment for the benefit of all wildlife.

Many cormorants are of the sub-species *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*, and there is no evidence that this inland bird has any history of existence in the UK before the last few decades. Goosanders were also not recorded in the UK in any significant number before the last century. Their massive growth in numbers has upset the natural balance of our freshwater environment.