

Nordic Cormorant meeting 19 May 2021



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

Memo, Marina Nyqvist

Stakeholder engagement in cormorant management plans & efforts - experiences from Nordic Countries

Stockholm Regional Cormorant Management Plan, *Clas Boström*, landowner

Stockholm County Administrative board initiated the process and employed an external and neutral process leader for the work. The process was open, anyone was welcome to join meetings. 4 meetings were held to discuss the plan, problems, and solutions.

1. Decisions made: the plan is to be a guidance document, especially to authorities, reaching consensus is not an aim of the process. A hearing will be arranged to gather comments from concerned parties. The management of the county administrative board makes the final decision.
- 2: Legal aspects of cormorant management, SLU aqua presented research results, various discussions were held, polarization started to increase.
- 3: Discussion on where management efforts are needed and management methods. Who has the time and resources to carry out management actions?
- 4: Discussion of population aims, e.g. moving colonies to the outer archipelago, importance of lakes. Decision on tactical adaptive and operational aim: halving number of nests. Guidelines on estimating damage caused by cormorants, process time 6 weeks, but in acute situations (new colonies) 1 week. Practical toolbox - hunting, egg treatment, scaring, destroying of nests. Leader of process: we do not require more knowledge to make acceptable decisions.

These four meetings took place from February to May 2019, plan ready and sent for public hearing in May 2020. The only change from hearing process was inclusion of “at the latest” in the aim: halving number of nests at the latest by 2030.

Revision of plan every 5 years, follow up on perch stock a driving factor.

Lessons drawn/experiences: positive experience of having one main author of the plan, willingness to make a difference important, open process important, decisionmakers involved (governor, top to bottom), avoid extreme language in discussions (invasive, eradicate etc.), be active and facilitate implementation.

- **Comments** by *Niklas Sjöberg*, Stockholm County Administrative board

The management plan has received positive response, also interest from other counties. However, it is not clear who will carry out the management efforts needed to implement the plan. No responsibility on its implementation was given the county administrative board. The plan could be better implemented in coming years. Stakeholders still need to apply for permissions.

The County Administrative board is now as a coordinating authority planning to appoint a 'fisheries promoting group' (e.g. made up by members of the previous FLAG group in Stockholm) to plan how to implement actions.

Discussion on implementation of the plan: In Stockholm a permit to shoot 1900 birds was given, decision supported by a draft of the plan.

The Ostrobothnian Regional Cormorant Management Plan, Marina Nyqvist, Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association

Ministry of Environment gave regional cormorant working groups the mandate to write management plans for their regions (if necessary) in 2016. The ostrobothnian group is an open regional group (> 30 members), a sub-group established to write the plan in 2017, 10 + meetings to discuss the plan, division of the writing tasks, ie. many authors. A Nordic research seminar was held to gather research information (establish joint knowledge base).

Work progressed well until the very end, major disagreement on majority decisions vs consensus (population aims, management efforts). This led to the withdrawal of environmental associations from the group, and them attaching dissenting opinions to the plan.

Aim of plan to act as a supporting document for applicants and for licensing authorities. Applicants have referred to the plan in several applications, but the licensing authorities have not yet considered it in their decisions, as it is not seen as a unanimous plan nor is it legally binding.

Lessons drawn/experiences: mistake not to discuss consensus vs. majority decisions at the beginning of the process, stakeholders need to take an active role, improved communication between stakeholders and licensing authorities and the ministry needed.

- Comments by Mari Pohja-Mykrä, South Western Finland Regional work group

There are three regional groups in Finland, only Ostrobothnian group has made a management plans. The South Western group meets every 6 months, it is a good platform to share recent research findings. Shared knowledge base is important among stakeholders. Need for active participation, the collaboration provides process responsibility and ownership, supporting adaptive governance.

Authorities have recently prepared a good webpage with guidance on how to make an adequate application. This is a key step towards a common language. One problem is that the language of authorities', i.e. biotechnological or ecological discourse, dominates discussion, there is a need to disseminate information in a format that is easy to understand by anyone not familiar with ecological or administrative language. Next step needed is to build tools to interpret local level knowledge and to meet local stakeholders (fishers) for real, and their response to the problem.

Stakeholder engagement in the Danish National Management Plan, Knud Flensted, Nature conservation advisor at Bird Life Denmark

Key to some success in Denmark on dealing with the cormorant conflict has been not to focus on the number of birds but on identifying the damage caused by cormorants and where it is, and how to prevent the damages. From a bird conservationist's view, it is not acceptable to eradicate a bird

species, which was a proposal from the beginning. Bird Life partners feel that problems with cormorants should be solved on a local level where the damages occur, not reducing the whole population. Documentation from case to case still needed, identifying the problem and solutions. Local problems, solutions should be local. Identifying the most important problems, not fixing the problem everywhere.

Fishermen wanting more fish and less cormorants is a political issue to solve.

Working group in cormorants set up 20 years ago, which lead to better communication between stakeholders. This has been very positive and have sustained a good relationship. When regular meetings and discussions are not held, it becomes more difficult to get agreements. The more dialogue you have, the higher are the chances of agreements.

The updated management plan (coming into force later this year after a public hearing), is probably the first plan not receiving consensus, or close to consensus. This is likely due to that fewer meetings have been held.

Lessons learned: regular meetings and direct communication between stakeholders very important, time is needed to get come to agreements.

Joint discussion on the cases

Comment by Pekka Salmi on reaching consensus in a working group. The last Finnish national cormorant Group was ordered to reach a unanimous report and did not go very far in managing the conflict. Launching the regional cormorant working groups was a novelty, but these groups (or their management plans) were not given real power to handle the local conflict situations.

Lasse Peltonen: neutral third-party process leader in Sweden very interesting, conflict management is not only on facilitating meetings, but also on the operational decision rules, can someone have veto power, majority decisions? What is the authority/concrete mandate/decision-making of a group?

Niels Jepsen: Number of nests are not important for each local fish stocks, the most important factor is the number of predating cormorants daily in the area, which is not reflected necessarily in number of nests. On a larger scale, nests can be used to see development of the total population.

Magnus Eliasson: There is a problem with Swedish and Finnish authorities and courts, have a problem with accepting results from studies on cormorant predation and effects of fisheries from other countries. Researchers must repeat the same studies in every country, it is frustrating and time consuming. This problem should be solved in a Nordic cooperation, as it may have to do with the legal systems. Burden of proof needed for management purposes.

Clas Boström: In five court cases in Sweden information from other countries has been used.

Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen: We have aimed to make the management plan in Denmark as adaptive as possible. The ministry decides what changes can be accepted before it is sent to a public hearing.

Per Risberg: Hunting legislation changes in Sweden under way will allow anyone with a hunting license to shoot cormorants without specific prior permit to prevent damages on fish. Conditions:

- not closer than 300 m distance from cormorants' nests Aug-Feb,

- within a distance of 300 m to fyke nets and nets, Aug – Feb,
- within 300 m from release place for fish stocking (7 d before and after stocking), June-July
- within 300 m from protected fish areas Aug-Feb

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/jaktforordning-1987905_sfs-1987-905 - see Bilaga ("Annex") 4, punkt 19. Valid from 1 July 2021.

Discussion of next steps and towards the final Meeting

Interim ideas & priority topics emerging from the process on 1) Co-operation between Nordic authorities – Sharing lessons between countries; 2) Nordic Research Collaboration on Cormorants – key focus areas for the future → These will inform/ be shared/presented in the final meeting

Aims, preparation and planned activities, practicalities

- Aim is for authorities to collaborate
- We need to discuss who is responsible, the question of responsibility needs to be raised to the correct level.
- The issue concerns all of EU, but this will be from Nordic collaboration

In between meetings

- Documentation of meeting & discussions
- Develop the Final report of the process jointly with participants
 - o recommendations – arising from NGO engagement – involvement of stakeholders

Final meeting

- EU commission representative – discuss cross-border regulation of Cormorants in EU, regulatory options, the Nordic/Baltic contribution to EU cormorant management
- Nordic council of ministers – discuss Cormorants on the Nordic agenda (e.g. sustainable bioeconomy)
- Suggested dates and place for the final meeting was **9-11 November 2021 in Mariehamn, Åland Islands**. The fisheries group of the Nordic Council of Ministers is meeting in Mariehamn during the same dates, and the plan is for a joint session to discuss needs for further collaboration and funding.
- Dr Nicola Notoro, Head of Nature Protection unit at DG Environment/EU commission has been invited. (Response received later in July, Micheal O'Briain will represent the Nature unit, but through virtual participation.

Finalize output of process

Integrate output of final meeting, report on the series, with recommendations on: Joint opportunities for Cormorant management in the Nordic Countries – management and research considerations. Circulation / publication / media?

Participants 19.5.2021

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Boström Clas	Land owner, member of the cormorant working group at the Stockholm County administrative board
Eliasson Magnus	Älvasjöns fiskeriområde
Flensted Knud	Bird Life Denmark
Jepsen Niels	Technical University of Denmark
Juslin Robin	Åland Provincial Government
Mikander Nina	Ministry of the Environment of Finland
Norrback Markus	Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association
Nyqvist Marina	Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association (organiser), member of regional cormorant group in Ostrobothnia
Ovegård Maria	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Peltonen Lasse	Akordi, University of Eastern Finland
Pohja-Mykrä Mari	Regional Council of Southwest Finland, member of South Regional Cormorant group in Southwest Finland
Risberg Per	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
Saarikoski Heli	Finnish Environment Institute
Salmi Pekka	Natural Resource Institute Finland
Saltin Karin	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
Sjöberg Niklas	Stockholm County Administrative board
Suvantola Leila	Ministry of the Environment of Finland
Svels Kristina	Natural Resource Institute Finland
Vestergaard Mikkelsen Caroline	Danish Nature Agency
Vikström Suvi	Finnish Environment Institute
Westerman Maria	Centre for Economic development, Transport and the Environment (Finland)