



ProtectFish Consortium reviews first 18 months of work and co-organises the 11th International Conference on Cormorants

PRESS RELEASE

Prague, 04 February 2026 – On 3 February 2026, the partners of the Horizon Europe project **ProtectFish** met at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague (Czech Republic) for a project review meeting with the European Commission. The meeting was held back-to-back with the **11th International Conference on Cormorants**, co-organised by the ProtectFish project. The review meeting was attended by the European Commission's Project Officer, **Francisco Javier Rodriguez Benavente**, and provided an opportunity to present the work carried out and results achieved during the first 18 months of the project, which started in July 2024. Over this initial period, all ProtectFish work packages have been highly active, with a strong emphasis on practical, field-based research and stakeholder engagement.

As part of this work, ProtectFish started to organise the first coordinated European-wide cormorant census since 2012, led by Work Package leader Dr Thomas Brengballe from Aarhus University. This major initiative was also highlighted at the 11th International Conference on Cormorants, which was organised collaboratively by the IUCN Cormorant Research Group and ProtectFish, with financial support from ProtectFish. Through this effort, the project aims to mobilise relevant stakeholders across Europe to contribute to the census and to strengthen the shared knowledge base on cormorant populations and their dynamics.

In parallel, ProtectFish partners are continuing their evaluation of current monitoring efforts for EU-listed river fish species. This work has resulted in the finalisation by the German Federal Institute of Hydrology, also a Work Package leader, of a methodological guide for public authorities entitled “Methodological approach for the assessment of the conservation status of European grayling”. While the guide focuses on a single species, its broader ambition is to serve as a basis for a future, more general methodology applicable to all freshwater fish species, supporting more practical and harmonised conservation status criteria across Europe, as well as clear recommendations for remedial action.

BOKU University is the partner in charge of coordinating several experimental studies that are being conducted in rivers across Denmark, Italy, Austria, Poland, Czech Republic and Germany. These experiments aim to estimate the impact of predation on protected fish species, analyse fish behaviour under predation pressure, and assess the rate and conditions under which fish populations can recover when predation intensity is reduced.



Communication and stakeholder engagement are central to the ProtectFish project, which relies on the active involvement of numerous volunteers and local authorities to achieve its research objectives. By generating robust and comparable scientific data, the project seeks to help de-escalate long-standing conservation conflicts related to fish predation and to support informed, science-based dialogue between fish and bird conservation actors and public authorities.

The meeting in Prague also marked one of the last official duties of the project coordinator, Dr Niels Jepsen, who will hand over the leadership of ProtectFish to his colleague at DTU Aqua, Dr Kim Birnie-Gauvin. The next ProtectFish consortium meeting, together with the project's External Advisory Board, will take place in April 2026 in Vienna (Austria).

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Pictures:





Note to the Editors:

[ProtectFish](#) is a 48-month project funded by the European Union. The project is coordinated by Technical University of Denmark – DTU. The following partners forming the project's consortium are:

- University of Aarhus:
 - <https://international.au.dk/>
- Federal Institute of Hydrology (BFG):
 - https://www.bafg.de/DE/0_Home/home_node.html
- BOKU University:
 - <https://boku.ac.at/en/>





- Czech Academy of Sciences:
 - <https://www.avcr.cz/en/>
- Sveriges Lantbrukuniversitet:
 - <https://www.slu.se/en/>
- CNR Istituto di Ricerca sulle Acque:
 - <https://www.irsacnr.it/wp/>
- Sakowicz Inland Fisheries Institute:
 - <https://www.infish.com.pl/en/content/about-institute>
- Aliénor:
 - <https://alienor.eu/>

Social media:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/protectfish>

The **project video** is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfHaohqvuGI>

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