New EU funded research project will analyse cormorants' role in the poor status of protected river fish species

BRUSSELS, 17/05/2024 – The **"ProtectFish"** research project will analyse the pressure of the Great Cormorant population on EU-Habitat-Directive-listed river fish species populations to develop protection measures and improve EU rivers' declining biodiversity. The Consortium carrying out this consists of universities, research institutes and SMEs from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. It will be coordinated by Dr. Niels Jepsen from the Danish Technical University.

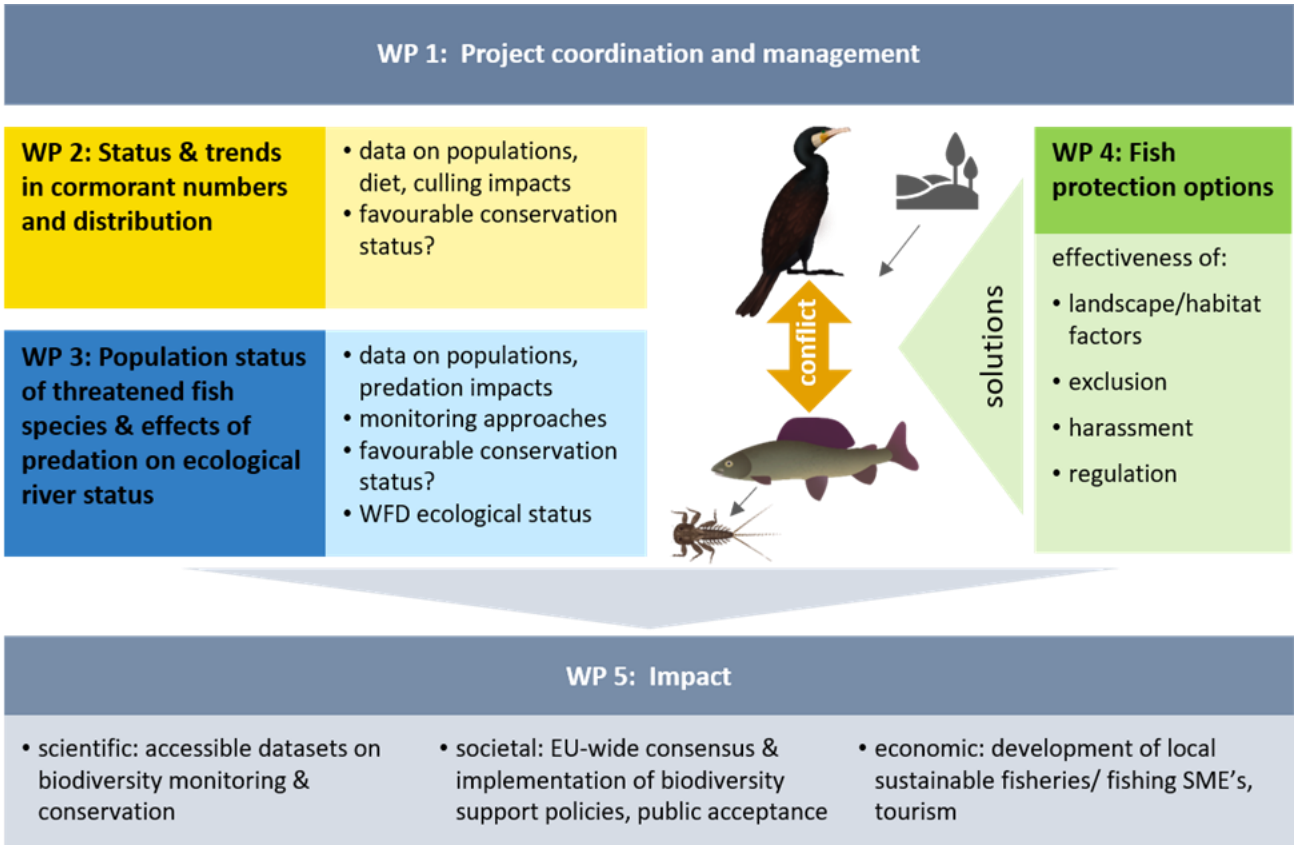
"The ProtectFish project will – in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders and hundreds of volunteers – aim at informing policy recommendations on fish protection and potentially improve management of threatened fish. It will not only benefit EU-endangered fish species but also the economic and leisure activities that rely on the good functioning of freshwater ecosystems." – Dr. Niels Jepsen, ProtectFish Coordinator.

A team of EU researchers and key experts have officially signed an agreement with the EU research-programme Horizon Europe on 17 May 2024 to launch a 4-years long research project in July 2024. The ProtectFish Consortium will carry out various types of field experiments, review existing results and organise consulting/workshops/interviews to evaluate & condense existing knowledge regarding the role of predation on protected river fish. The role of predation and predation control will be measured in river stretches patrolled by hundreds of volunteers. In shorter river segments, the effect of physical structures such as nets and natural structures on fish survival will be studied. Electro-fishing data in combination with wildlife cameras will be used to monitor and count predators and prey to assess the impact of predation on EU-protected fish.

Decades of documentation have indicated that predation from abundant piscivores is an important cause for the very critical situation of many freshwater fish species in the EU. However, the success has been marginal, despite countless measures taken individually by EU Member States to reduce pressures and improve fish populations within their borders, the success has been marginal. For a great migratory species such as the cormorant co-created management measures – developed in close cooperation between scientists, NGOs, river managers and other stakeholders – may improve biodiversity, boost the ecosystem-services rendered by freshwater ecosystems while reducing societal conflicts. The ProtectFish project will strive to find potential policy options.

With its research, ProtectFish will contribute to the achievement of the EU Biodiversity Strategy objectives and of the good ecological status objectives for rivers set by the EU-Water Framework Directive (WFD) in the year 2000.

ProtectFish is a project funded by the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the call HORIZON-CL6-2023-BIODIV-01-4. Learn more about ProtectFish by visiting our social media accounts (Twitter & LinkedIn). A project website is under construction.



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Note to the Editors:

The consortium partners of this project are:

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- University of Aarhus: https://international.au.dk/
- 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.irsa.cnr.it/wp/
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The ProtectFish project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement nr. 101134976. It reflects only the author's view. The Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.