

# *Slaney River Trust*

## *2010 News*

### **Fisheries board calls for seal and cormorant data**

**The Irish Times**

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THE SOUTH Western Regional Fisheries Board is calling on the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to set optimum target numbers for seals and great cormorants amid alarm among fishermen that these two protected species are threatening salmon and eel numbers, which are also protected.

The board fears the various protected species will wipe each other out. "We need to have a clear statement what the desired number of seals and cormorants is. Seal pups are perceived to have increased, and cormorants are also perceived to have increased. We need the data," said Aidan Barry, chief executive of the board.

A ban on eel fishing has recently been introduced to preserve what is a very endangered species, yet more cormorants posed just as big a threat, fishermen have told the fisheries' board.

The board meeting heard that before the ban on salmon drift net fishing fishermen had to get to nets quickly before grey seals in particular tore them to rob salmon.

Since the net ban, the seals, including harbour seals, are believed to have moved towards river mouths where salmon are easier to catch.

Cormorants had also been noticed moving up rivers in greater numbers. They had "profound negative effects" on young salmon and eel numbers, a workshop on cormorant control in fisheries heard in 2007.

End

The 1976 Wildlife Act and the 2000 Wildlife Act provide full protection for cormorants. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government can issue licences to shoot the birds under exceptional circumstances.

A workshop by an EU fisheries advisory commission on the need to take a Europe-wide approach to control the birds was told that there was a lack of scientific data on the damage caused by cormorants to fish stocks. It concluded there may be a case for removing the cormorant from the list of protected species.

Meanwhile, grey seals have increased and now number several hundred in the Blaskets alone, according to seal surveys by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Common seals have also increased.

Mr Barry said "boom and bust" would prevail if matters were left to nature and allowed to continue unregulated. The seals and birds would eat out the salmon and eels and eventually would die themselves after ending their food supply.

A presentation to the board by Vincent Roche, chief executive of the North Western Fisheries Board, calculated seals in that area were now eating more salmon than that eaten by humans.