

# NRW Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group

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# What do we know?



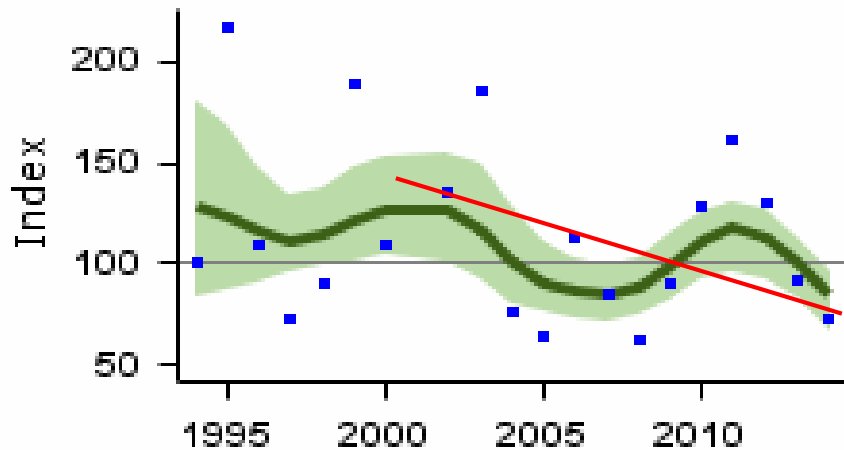
**Dramatic declines in salmonid populations** in 23 principal salmon rivers in Wales, with all now classified as ‘At Risk’ or ‘Probably at Risk’

Strong evidence that in the UK cormorant and goosander can **take large numbers of fish from natural and stocked fisheries**

Impacts of cormorant and goosander on wild and stocked fisheries have been the focus of a **Defra led policy review** in England (2013) and two **evidence reviews in Scotland** (2008, 2016)

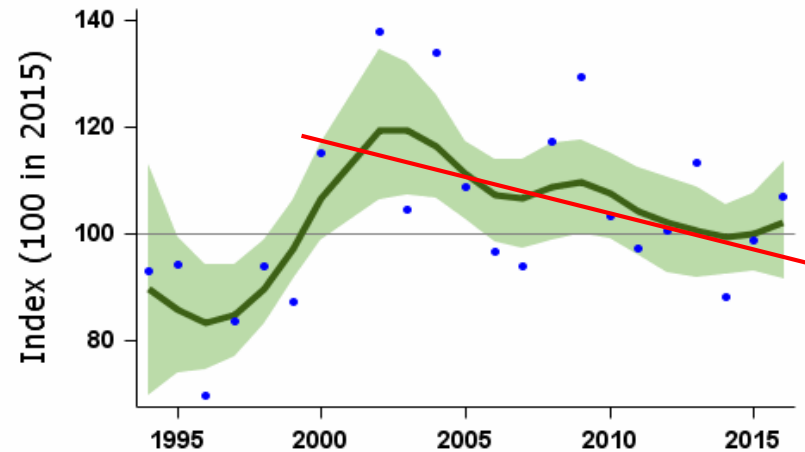
# FEB populations changes

BBS UK 1994–2014  
Goosander



In Wales Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) index shows, steady **increase in wintering numbers** since late 1980s: UK BBS suggests a **gradual decline in breeding numbers**

BBS UK 1994–2016  
Cormorant



In Wales Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) index shows, a steady **increase in wintering numbers** since the 1990s: UK BBS suggests a **gradual decline in breeding numbers**

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# Timeline

**January 2018:** NRW Board ask for investigation of the concerns of the fishing sector in relation to the impact of fish-eating birds on fish stocks

**July 2018:** NRW FEB Advisory Group established to meet the challenges set by NRW Board and BREB

**May 2019:** NRW FEB Advisory Group submit recommendations paper to NRW Board

**June 2019:** Recommendations paper approved by NRW Board and submitted to Welsh Government for consideration

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# NRW FEB Advisory Group

## Purpose

To review Wales fish-eating birds policy, establish evidence base and establish expert opinion in order to ensure Welsh policy is evidence led, robust and fit for purpose.



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# NRW Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group



## Key outputs

1. Analysis of the Scottish and English Reviews and their applicability to Wales
2. Literature review/evidence inventory of information relevant to Wales
3. Review of current NRW fish-eating bird control licensing process
4. Report and Recommendations paper for NRW Board

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# NRW Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group

## Key findings

- There is no Wales policy on how to address the conservation conflict between fish-eating birds and natural and stocked fisheries.
- There is a insufficient data of wintering and breeding cormorant and goosander at differing spatial scales in Wales.
- The decision-making process to assess applications for licences to kill fish-eating birds is not robust and may be open to legal challenge.

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# NRW FEB Advisory Group

## Recommendations

- R1. Policy is developed to guide the approach to address the impacts of predation by FEBs on riverine salmonids and inland fisheries in Wales
  
- R2. Establish a Wales FEB Policy Working Group, to deliver Recommendation 1
  
- R3. Continue to review the current licensing system in relation to FEBs in Wales



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## Wales FEB Advisory Group will:

**Appraise** the effectiveness, where practically possible, of non-lethal and lethal control of FEBs in preventing serious damage to natural and stocked fisheries.

**Determine** population estimates and trends for breeding and wintering FEBs at national and/or Area Statement scale.

**Determine** how to interpret population estimates for salmon and sea trout and fish-eating birds at national and/or Area Statement scale.

**Determine** whether a FEB population-based model, similar to models adopted in England and Scotland, is required for Wales.

**Assess** the need for a regional (i.e. NRW Statement Areas) and/or catchment-based licensing approach in Wales.

**Develop** a fit-for purpose NRW licensing policy.

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# The Advisory Group recommend a five-phase approach

- Phase 1**      Establish a Wales FEB Working Group with the mandate to lead an evidence-led approach to help develop new policy.
- Phase 2**      Evidence and data gathering.
- Phase 3**      Analysis and assessment (including advice as whether evidence indicates public consultation is appropriate).
- Phase 4**      Public consultation (if required).
- Phase 5**      Final reporting and recommendations.

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# Key questions

There are four key questions that are required to be addressed to develop Welsh policy:

- Q1. What are the population numbers and trends of FEBs and salmon and sea trout in Wales, and how can these data be interpreted alongside each other?
- Q2. What are the socio-economic effects and population impacts of predation by FEBs on endangered populations of salmon and sea trout and inland fisheries in Wales?
- Q3. Does/can anthropogenic interference (ie pollution, degraded habitat) increase predation pressure?
- Q4. Is bird predation a limiting factor contributing to salmonid population decline and suppressing stock recovery,

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# In scope

The Wales FEB Working Group will consider:

- Appraise effectiveness of lethal control and non-lethal measures
- Population Modelling and conservation status
- Catchment approach to licensing
- The current licensing process
- Communication strategy to fisheries and others

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## Out of scope:

The Wales FEB Working Group will not consider:

- the impact of climate change on either fish or bird populations, other than to continue to highlight these issues;
- a national cull for cormorant or goosander;
- interactions with the Water Framework Directive (WFD);
- a review outside Wales

**It is expected that details regarding the process of review and outcomes will be shared with all devolved Governments**

# Next step



## **Spring 2020**

- Phase 1: Convene a Wales FEB Working Group
- Phase 2: Data and Evidence Gathering

## **Autumn 2020**

- Phase 3: Analysis and Assessment (including whether evidence indicates public consultation is appropriate)
- Phase 4: Public consultation (if necessary)

## **Spring 2021**

- Phase 5: Policy developed and report to NRW

## Key risks with no action

- Welsh Government and NRW being out of alignment with the fish-eating bird's policy approach developed by NE and SNH and their respective Governments.
- NRW vulnerable to legal challenge by NGOs (e.g. RSPB), and/or campaign groups (e.g. Wild Justice).
- Failure to take advantage of Welsh policy and legislative framework to safe guard our most endangered species.

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# Thank you for listening

