

Response to the Peer Reviewers Comments

Defra welcome the observations and suggestions from the two peer reviewers and accept their constructive comments. Generally both peer reviewers considered the model to be sound and robust – making good use of the available data. Both reviewers agreed that the conclusions are soundly based on the evidence presented

The reviewers make a range of suggestions to improve and clarify the model's content and presentation. The intention is that the model will be reassessed on a regular basis to incorporate new data as it becomes available and their suggestions will be incorporated into the next version of the model.

One reviewer makes specific comments in relation to the methods used to estimate the likely winter cormorant population present in 1979. To help answer these points, Defra have commissioned a project with the British Trust for Ornithology, one of the key organisations involved in the collection and interpretation of the WeBs data on which the model is built. This contract, which is due to report at the end of May 2005, will re-examine the WeBs data for the cormorant, in particular that from the early years of the scheme, and produce a more detailed assessment of the size and uncertainty around the annual WeBs indices. It is also expected that figures for the actual number of cormorants removed under license during the winter of 2004/05 will be available in May/June 2005. Once this report has been accepted and the data on licensed removal collated, then the model will be re-run based on the new data, and incorporating the suggestions from the peer reviewers, to revise the estimates and the likely impact of culling. The next version of the model will be available during the summer of 2005 in time to advise on the appropriate number of licenses to be considered for the coming winter. This model will then be published on the Defra web and a paper submitted to a peer reviewed scientific journal to consider for publication.