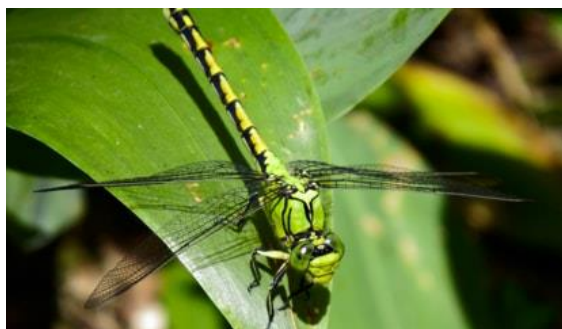


## Green Gomphid (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*) – Denmark (CON)



Conservation status	DK: FV
Protection status	HD: Annex II and IV Bern Convention: Annex 2; Revised Annex I of Resolution 6
Population (2007-12)	EU27: > 52,200,000 – 129,300,000 individuals DK: Unknown
MS with genuine improvement	AT (CON), DK (CON), NL
Other MS	AT (ALP), BG, CZ, DE, DK (ATL), EE, FI, FR, GR, HU, IT, LV, PL, RO, SI, SK

Photo: A Hikari (WikiMedia Commons)

**Summary:** Between 1900 and 1975, populations of the Green Gomphid dragonfly (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*) declined strongly due to water pollution and large-scale channelisation of rivers and brooks as well as increased use of river water for irrigation (in southern Europe). Since the 1970s, efforts to improve water quality, restore the natural structure of rivers and manage river systems more naturally, together targeted conservation projects have contributed to population increases in some regions (e.g. Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands), although it remains threatened in many other areas. Denmark has reported genuine improvements in the species' conservation status within its Continental biogeographical region, which are the result of a combination of broad conservation measures. These include the protection of key habitats within the Natura 2000 network, restoring/improving water quality and hydrological regimes in large river systems, reducing nutrient loads, restoring key habitats, and re-introducing species where needed to restored areas. These measures have been financed in part with the help of LIFE, EAFRD and EFF funds. Of particular importance were the EAFRD funds (ca. 86 million DKK from 2012-2013), which were utilised for the hydrological improvements across Danish Natura 2000 sites, including restoration of their natural hydrology and reducing nutrient loads. This concentrated on restoring natural hydrology and reducing nutrient loads, as more than 80% of the Denmark's terrestrial area is within a river catchment area of an aquatic Natura 2000 site; all measures taken to reduce nutrient loads thus support the improvement of the conservation status of numerous aquatic habitats and species including the Green Gomphid.

### Background

#### Status and EU occurrence

The Green Gomphid dragonfly (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*)<sup>1</sup> is widespread across central and northeast Europe and parts of north-western Asia, but is scarcer in the western parts of its range. Within the EU, the dragonfly occurs in the Alpine, Atlantic, Black Sea, Boreal, Continental, Pannonian and Steppic biogeographic regions. As a whole, populations declined strongly from ca. 1900 – 1975, with some regions experiencing such a significant decrease that some local populations became extinct. Since the 1990s, the IUCN reports that populations have increased in the Netherlands and Germany (Kalkman, 2010), and probably further countries as well. Improved water quality, targeted conservation projects, and a more natural management of river systems (including some renaturing of rivers) is likely to be the main cause of such improvements. Furthermore, a series of Natura 2000 sites act as important 'stepping stones' for the dragonfly, connecting populations across national boundaries and various regions. For example, sites in Bavaria connect western populations from France and the Pfälzer Wald (an area of Germany close to France) with populations in the east of Germany (Raab, n.d.).

According to EU Member State Article 17 reports the dragonfly's conservation status over the last reporting period (2007-2012) was favourable in the Black Sea, Continental and Pannonian biogeographic regions, but unfavourable-inadequate in the Atlantic, Boreal and Steppic regions, and unknown in the Alpine and Mediterranean regions (Annex 1). In the Continental region, its previous assessment for 2001-06 was unfavourable-inadequate, but this is believed to be predominantly due to the addition of Bulgaria since 2007 in the reporting; so not a genuine improvement. Of the ten Member States in which it occurs within the Continental

<sup>1</sup> Natura 2000 species code 1037

region, it has a favourable status in seven, including Denmark, but an unfavourable-inadequate status in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Romania.

In Denmark, the Green Gomphid only occurs in Jutland, wherever it is linked to a number of major watercourse systems (Sogaard et al. 2013). Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the species has been known from five watercourse systems: Varde Å, Skjern Å, Karup Å, Gudenå og Storå. While an increase in the species' occurrence has been detected in most systems, the species has not been sighted in the Varde A system since 1943. In the 1970, the species was believed to be in drastic decline in Denmark, today however, the species appears to have recovered well, with an increase in occurrence of the species of 400% in the Continental region between 2004-2011 (Rasmussen 2007, Sogaard et al. 2013). Consequently, in its Article 17 report, Denmark indicated that the dragonfly's favourable conservation status in the Continental region over 2007-2012 was a genuine improvement from the previous unfavourable-inadequate assessment.

### **Ecological requirements**

Adult Green Gomphids prefer moderately flowing waters which are at least partly unshaded, as well as rivers and brooks in lowlands that have a sandy bottom (Kalkman, 2010). Additional critical requirements are varying flow rates and moderate water depths (<50 cm), nearby forest (<250 m), river sections with a rippled surface as well as sections with submerged vegetation, and sunlit riverbanks (Landesbund für Vogelschutz in Bayern e.V., 2015). These conditions are important for the males to be able to sunbathe close to the watercourses (when not flying low and quickly over the water surface) and for the females to immerse their abdomens into the water after mating. Larvae also prefer such conditions for their first 3-4 years of development, where they live partially dug into sand and gravel bottoms (Fugle og Natur, 2013). The dragonfly is largely absent from stoney mountain brooks, rivers with a strong current, and muddy rivers as these are far less suitable habitats. The density of individuals varies strongly from site to site, but the Green Gomphid is frequently locally abundant (Kalkman, 2010).

### **Pressures and threats**

Historically, the Green Gomphid faced significant population declines and even localised extinctions in some cases. In the period between 1900-1975, key causes were probably water pollution and large-scale channelization of rivers and brooks as well as by increased use of river water for irrigation (in southern Europe) and canalisation of water courses, causing high fluctuations of water levels and seasonal drying (Kalkman, 2010). In some river systems, waves resulting from large boat traffic could have been responsible for increased mortality amongst emerging adults (Kalkman, 2010).

Despite improvements since the 1970s, the dragonfly remains threatened in many areas of Europe due to unfavourable habitat conditions. Of key importance are, for example, missing river dynamics, densely vegetated river banks and flow regulation (Landesbund für Vogelschutz in Bayern e.V., 2015). Other features still having negative impacts on populations include inappropriate management measures implemented along rivers, the increased density of shading by trees along watercourses, the influx of nutrients and agrochemical pollutants, and the loss of structural diversity in rivers (Raab, n.d.). According to the last Article 17 report, many Member States across the region listed the following threats and pressures as being of high importance: the modification of cultivation practices, agricultural intensification, fertilisation, sand and gravel extraction, pollution to surface waters, diffuse pollution to surface waters due to agricultural and forestry activities, human induced changes in hydraulic conditions, landfill, land reclamation and drying out, general, removal of sediments, canalisation and water deviation, modification of hydrographic functioning, dykes and flooding defence in inland water systems, reduction or loss of specific habitat features and abiotic (slow) natural processes (EEA/ETC-BD, undated).

In the case of Denmark's Continental region, the main reported pressures and threats listed in the last Article 17 report were fertilisation and pollution to surface waters (limnic and terrestrial, marine and brackish). However, it should be noted that these were all ranked as being of 'low importance'.

## Drivers of improvements: actors, actions and their implementation approaches

### Organisers, partners, supporters and other stakeholders

The improvement of the species' conservation status in Denmark is directly linked to the measures taken towards restoring watercourses in Jutland. This was supported by the LIFE project 'Restoration of habitats and wildlife of Skjern River' (see Annex 2), which established a working group and an advisory board of local and national authorities as well as NGOs to assess different restoration measures that could be applied to the area, thus directly advising the Danish government on its course of action (Andersen 2005). A public hearing phase for ideas and proposals was included in the final Parliament Act on Restoration of the Skjern River of 1997. As part of this Act, a monitoring system was put in place in cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and the regional environmental authority (Ringkjobing County); carried out by the National Environmental Research Institute, the County, the Danish Institute for Fisheries Research and the Danish Forest and Nature Agency, to evaluate the impacts of the project (Andersen 2005).

### Contributions / relevance of strategic plans

While there are no species action plans specifically targeting the Green Gomphid, the Act on Environmental Objectives for Water Bodies and Internationally Protected Sites<sup>2</sup> includes 'passive protection' through Articles 6.4 and 6.4 which could benefit the species. These items set procedures for sector legislation, such as on watercourses (including the regulation and use of watercourses) and nature protection. There is also a national 'Nature Plan' for Denmark (Ministry of the Environment, 2014) which is assumed to have positive indirect benefits for the species, but the dragonfly is not mentioned within the plan.

### Measures taken and their effectiveness

Denmark reported that in 2007 to 2012, the following conservation measures were taken for the Green Gomphid.

#### Application of conservation measures for the Green Gomphid (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*) for 2007-2012 in Denmark

Measure	Type	Ranking	Inside / outside N2K	Broad evaluation
6.3 - Legal protection of habitats and species	Legal Administrative	High	Both	Maintain
4.2 - Restoring/improving the hydrological regime	Legal Administrative Contractual Recurrent	High	Inside	Maintain

Source: Denmark Article 17 report 2013 at

[http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/Converters/run\\_conversion?file=/dk/eu/art17/envuqrtva/DK\\_species\\_reports-131220-95922.xml&conv=354&source=remote#1037CON](http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/Converters/run_conversion?file=/dk/eu/art17/envuqrtva/DK_species_reports-131220-95922.xml&conv=354&source=remote#1037CON)

Regarding the first reported Danish conservation measure ('Legal protection of habitats and species'), a total of 42,604 ha have been designated across 13 Danish Natura 2000 SAC sites for the protection of the Green Gomphid (Fredshavn et al, 2017). Additionally, the measures agreed with the adoption of the River Basin Management Plans (implemented by 2015) significantly improved Denmark's five major relevant watercourse systems, which was key to the species' increase in population between 2004-2014, given that 85% of the Danish terrestrial area is within a river catchment (Svendsen et al. 2005, Jensen et al. 2014). Specifically, the actions to restore 5,300 km of rivers and streams by reducing maintenance and removing dams may have been of importance here (Fredshavn et al. 2017).

Furthermore, a number of conservation measures relating to restoring/improving the hydrological regime have contributed to the species' recovery in Denmark (Rasmussen 2007). As reported in the Danish 2014-2020 PAF (Ministry of the Environment, 2013), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funds were utilised to complement Natura 2000 measures, following the actions decided under the Water Framework Directive. Specifically, measures under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) aim to establish and manage

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=127102>.

wetlands, restore watercourses and reduce nutrient loads. The latter is of particular importance as more than 80% of the Denmark's terrestrial area is within a river catchment area of an aquatic Natura 2000 site. All measures taken to reduce nutrient loads thus support the improvement of the conservation status of numerous aquatic habitats and species.

As national monitoring has shown, improvements in the Green Gomphid's conservation status are linked to river restoration measures in the five main river systems in which the species occurs. For example, the Skjern is the largest river in Denmark in terms of volume, and its restoration has been called 'one of the most comprehensive nature restoration projects in northern Europe' (Hansen 2002). Conservation measures conducted as part of wider restoration efforts, and specifically within the Skjern River LIFE project, included heavy-duty construction work to re-meander the river along a more natural course over a stretch of 20 km. This served to rectify poor physical conditions in the riverbed and its tributaries (due to channeling) and thus re-establish the river's capacity for self-purification. In turn, this led to improved water quality and habitat conditions and had positive effects on the occurrence of species protected by the Habitat Directive, including the Green Gomphid (Andersen 2005). Targeted measures taken as part of the LIFE project 'SemiAquaticLife – Recreating habitat complexity for semi-aquatic fauna' (Annex 2) can also be assumed to have played a role in population improvements. 'SemiAquaticLife' focused on restoring and improving the conservation status of amphibians, reptiles and semi-aquatic insects in Natura 2000 sites in southern Sweden (11 sites), Denmark (19 sites) and Germany (9 sites) through the restoration and creation of wetlands and territorial habitats in a number of Natura 2000 sites and, when necessary, re-introductions. Although the components of the project implemented in Denmark did not specifically target the Green Gomphid, improvements in watercourse conditions resulting from actions taken in the project in neighbouring Germany and Sweden are believed to have contributed to the recovering dragonfly population.

#### **Funding sources (current and long-term) and costs (one-off and ongoing)**

As reported in the Danish 2014-2020 PAF (Ministry of the Environment, 2013), some EAFRD funds (ca. 86 million DKK from 2012-2013) were utilised for the hydrological improvements across Danish Natura 2000 sites, including restoration of their natural hydrology and reducing their nutrient loads. The PAF subsequently outlines that funds from the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) also concern rivers and streams both within and beyond Natura 2000 sites for the benefit of riverine habitats and species. Specifically, the revised Danish Operational Programme for 2012-2013 under Axis 3 (specified as measure 3 'Restoration of rivers and streams' in chapter 6.6.5 'Protection and development of aquatic flora and fauna') includes measures for which ca. 138 million DKK have been provided under the EFF (Ministry of the Environment, 2013).

While there have been no LIFE projects focusing on the Green Gomphid within Denmark, the LIFE programme was a significant funding source. As described above, the SemiAquaticLife project and River Skjern LIFE project were of particular significance, and had total budgets of €5.8 million and €7.4 million respectively. LIFE funds from other projects were also used to target wet grassland, raised bogs, and riparian nature (Ministry of the Environment, 2013), and it can be assumed they also benefited the dragonfly if only indirectly.

#### **Future actions**

The current Danish PAF for Natura 2000 in 2014-2020 (Ministry of Environment, 2013) identifies no priority conservation measures specifically targeting the Green Gomphid. However, it outlines a number of foreseen actions for 2016-2021 which can potentially further benefit the species, including: reducing fragmentation of habitats for species by improving connectivity, establishing 50,000 ha of non-cultivated buffer zones along environmentally valuable watercourses, and applying (further) grants for the restoration of watercourses<sup>3</sup> (largely co-financed by the CAP RDP). The PAF also lists the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) as a potential funding source for further restoring meanders and natural dynamics of water courses and natural river banks (planned potentially for 2016-2020). As the improvement of the species' conservation status is clearly linked to past improvements in water quality in the five watercourses in which the species occurs, further improvements of water quality will probably enable the species to re-colonise suitable habitats in adjacent river systems north and south of the current distribution area (Sogaard & Asferg 2009, Sogaard et al. 2015). This will make monitoring and improvements of potential habitats in north and south Jutland necessary in the future (*idim*).

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<sup>3</sup> More on the subsidy schemes available here:

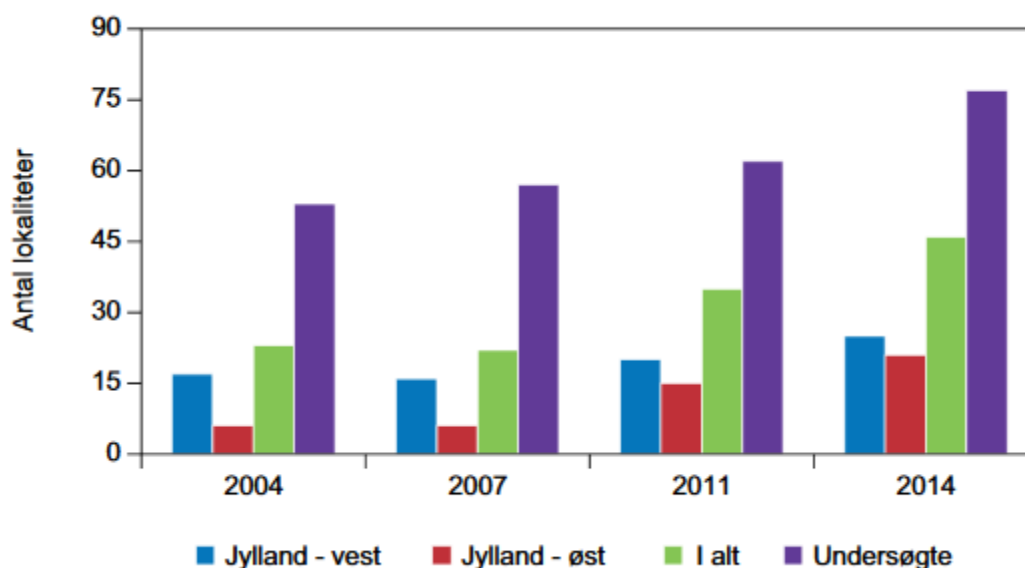
<http://www.naturstyrelsen.dk/Naturbeskyttelse/Naturprojekter/Projekttyper/Vandprojekter/Vandlobsrestaurering/>.

## Achievements

### Impacts on the target species

While specific population numbers are not known, the number of sites in which the Green Gomphid occurs has continuously increased between 2004 and 2014 (see figure below, Sorgaard et al. 2015). This has resulted in Denmark reporting a genuine improvement in the conservation status of the *Green Gomphid* population within the continental region. This improvement is a consequence of the various hydrological measures described above in addition to its legal status within Denmark's Natura 2000 network.

### Number of sites with occurrence of Green Gomphid in the period 2004-2014 - as well as the number of sites examined during the period (Sogaard 2015)



### Other impacts (e.g. other habitats and species, ecosystem services, economic and social)

Based on the information reviewed, the conservation of the Green Gomphid is mostly an indirect effect of management measures. Direct effects of conservation measures usually include improvements in water quality, meandering of rivers and restoration of natural dynamics which also benefited a myriad of additional riverine-related species.

## Conclusions and lessons learnt

### The key targeted conservation measures that led to the improvements

- Hydrological restoration, focusing on flow and quality-oriented measures and reconnecting river sections with previously separated populations to enable the species to re-colonise suitable habitats in adjacent river systems.
- Legal protection of the species.
- Measures aiming to increase river dynamics, create sunlit river banks and optimise larval habitats, (e.g. widening of rivulets and rivers, shore recession, creating additional branches of the river, gravel fills, placing large woody debris and thinning shrubs and reed belts at the banks).

### Conservation measures that have not been sufficiently effective

- No information was found on this topic.

### Factors that supported the conservation measures

- Significant supplemental European financing for conducting conservation measures played an important role in Green Gomphid improvements. Of particular importance were the large scale of funds provided for reducing nutrient loads and restoring watercourses provided through EAFRD and the habitat restoration measures funded by LIFE projects.
- Hydrological flow and quality-related measures carried out as part of the RBMP to restore large segments of rivers and streams.
- Reducing fragmentation of habitats for species by improving connectivity, establishing 50,000 ha of non-cultivated buffer zones along environmentally valuable watercourses, and applying (further) grants for the restoration of watercourses (largely co-financed by the CAP RDP).

### Factors that constrained conservation measures

- The lack of a targeted species action plan for the Green Gomphid.
- The species is not explicitly mentioned or targeted by concrete conservation measures in the PAF; positive impacts on the species were rather a side effect of wider conservation actions than a consequence of species-specific targeted actions (which would presumably have larger benefits for the species' population)

### Quick wins that could be applied elsewhere for the species

- None were identified for this species from this case study.

### Examples of good practice, which could be applied to other species

- Use of LIFE funds to finance large-scale river restoration measures in areas of high conservation value, as in the 'Restoration of habitats and wildlife of Skjern River', which undertook construction work in the river bed and its tributaries for re-meandering 20 km of the river along a more natural course. This enhanced nutrient retention capacity of the river system and enhanced the physical conditions of the site. In turn, this led to improved water quality and habitat conditions and had positive effects on the occurrence of species protected by the Habitat Directive, including the Green Gomphid, as well as thousands of migratory bird species and other wildlife.
- Use of EAFRD funds to complement Natura 2000 measures, following the actions decided under the Water Framework Directive, in which the RDP measures aim to establish and manage wetlands, restore watercourses and reduce nutrient loads. The latter is of particular importance as more than 80% of the Denmark's terrestrial area is within a river catchment of an aquatic Natura 2000 site. All measures taken to reduce nutrient loads thus support the improvement of the conservation status of numerous aquatic habitats and species.

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## Authorship

Prepared by McKenna Davis of Ecologic Institute, as part of the European Commission study on identifying the drivers of successful implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives (under contract ENV.F.1/FRA/2014/0063), carried out by the Institute for European Environmental Policy, BirdLife International, Deloitte, Denkstatt, Ecologic Institute, ICF Consulting Services and PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

The information and views set out in this case study are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Commission.

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Photograph: A Hikari (WikiMedia Commons) *Ophiogomphus cecilia* in the forest near Pushcha-Voditsa, Kiev, Ukraine". WikiMedia Commons used under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

## Annex 1. Status of the Green Gomphid (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*) at Member State and biogeographical levels

Favourable **FV**
Unknown **XX**
Unfavourable - inadequate **U1**
Unfavourable - bad **U2**

Qualifier (+) improving (-) deteriorating (=) stable (x) unknown (n/a) not reported

	2001-06	2007-12				
	Overall	Range	Population	Habitat for species	Future	Overall (with trend)
AT (ALP)	U1	U1	U1	FV	U1	U1 (=)
BG (ALP)	N/A	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
PL (ALP)	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
RO (ALP)	N/A	FV	U1	U1	U1	U1
SI (ALP)	N/A	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1 (x)
SK (ALP)	U2	U1	FV	FV	U1	U1 (=)
<b>EU overall (ALP)</b>	U1	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX (x)
DE (ATL)	U1	U1	U1	U1	FV	U1 (+)
DK (ATL)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
FR (ATL)	FV	FV	FV	FV	XX	FV
NL (ATL)	U2	U2	U2	U1	FV	U2 (+)
<b>EU overall (ATL)</b>	U1	U1	U1	U1	XX	U1 (+)
BG (BLS)	N/A	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
<b>EU overall (BLS)</b>	XX	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV (=)
EE (BOR)	U1	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
FI (BOR)	U1	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
LT (BOR)	FV	FV	U1	FV	FV	U1
LV (BOR)	FV	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1 (x)
SE (BOR)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
<b>EU overall (BOR)</b>	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1 (x)
AT (CON)	U1	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
BG (CON)	N/A	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
CZ (CON)	U1	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1 (=)
DE (CON)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
DK (CON)	U1 (+)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
FR (CON)	XX	FV	FV	FV	XX	FV
IT (CON)	U2	FV	FV	FV	XX	FV
PL (CON)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
RO (CON)	N/A	FV	U1	U1	U1	U1
SI (CON)	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1 (=)
<b>EU overall (CON)</b>	U1	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV (=)
GR (MED)	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
<b>EU overall (MED)</b>	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
CZ (PAN)	U1	FV	FV	U1	U1	U1 (=)
HU (PAN)	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV
RO (PAN)	N/A	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1
SK (PAN)	U1 (-)	FV	FV	FV	U1	U1 (-)
<b>EU overall (PAN)</b>	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV	FV (=)
RO (STE)	N/A	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1
<b>EU overall (STE)</b>	XX	U1	U1	U1	U1	U1 (=)

Source: Member State Article 17 reports as presented on EIONET

<https://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/species/summary/?period=3&group=Arthropods&subject=Ophiogomphus+cecilia&region=CON>

**Annex 2. LIFE Nature Projects in Denmark that contributed to the improvement in conservation status of the Green Gomphid (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*)**

Project Title	Project N°	MS	Type Of Beneficiary
Skjern River - Restoration of habitats and wildlife of the Skjern River	LIFE00 NAT/DK/007116	DK	National authority
SemiAquaticLife - "Recreating habitat complexity for semi-aquatic fauna	LIFE14 NAT/SE/000201)	SE, DE, DK	Regional authority

Source: Text above and Life Programme database.