



# Sustainable Eel Group

Newsletter November 2015

Welcome to our third newsletter, with the latest eel news from across Europe.

The Sustainable Eel Group (SEG) held a defining meeting at the Zoological Society London (ZSL) on 16 September 2015, at which the directional plan for the next five years was unanimously agreed. Our key objectives are:

- To organise and mature SEG’s governance and structures as one European entity
- To win funding to achieve SEG’s goal
- To develop the communication network across Europe so that the SEG message is heard, believed and acted upon
- To enable, coordinate and expand sound eel scientific research
- To build and develop conservation programmes with partners throughout the eel’s natural range
- To promote sustainable fisheries and commercial supply chains in the major countries concentrating on the ‘Atlantic’ focus first
- To achieve ISEAL accreditation (membership) for the SEG Standard, its governance and complementary programmes

To help plan, develop and implement these objectives we called for nominations for European eel leaders from Science, Conservation and the

Commercial sectors to work with the SEG Chairman.

We are delighted to announce the following appointments :

**Science:** Willem Dekker (SLU) (Sweden)

**Conservation:** Alison Debney (ZSL) (UK)

**Commercial:** Alex Koelewijn (DUPAN) (The Netherlands)



SEG’s European Leadership Team

To underpin, develop and refine the sustainable eel agenda it was agreed that SEG’s Standard and approach should seek to achieve Full ISEAL Membership, implying compliance with ISEAL Codes of Good Practice for Standards Development, Assurance, and Impact Monitoring and Evaluation ([www.isealalliance.org](http://www.isealalliance.org)). To help with this journey SEG will contract with Mathew Wenban-Smith from the OneWorldStandards consultancy. He has worked closely with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) advising on standards and certification.

We look forward to meeting many colleagues and supporters at the forthcoming conference in Peterborough. **Andrew Kerr, Chairman SEG**



## Staying in touch

Twitter: @EelGroup

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sustainableeelgroup](http://www.facebook.com/sustainableeelgroup)

Web: [www.sustainableeelgroup.com/news](http://www.sustainableeelgroup.com/news)

Email: [segprossoffice@gmail.com](mailto:segprossoffice@gmail.com)

## Diary Dates

Next SEG meeting: January 13 2016, Holland

World Fish Migration Day: May 21 2016

## Germany launches Eel Stewardship Fund



Germany's IFEA has created an Eel Stewardship Fund as part of a broad plan to help accelerate the eel's recovery in Europe. A contribution to this fund is made per eel sold and these eels will be branded with the ESF logo.

The fund will help IFEA with practical actions, such as restocking and research, as well as communications with members, the industry and external organisations. DUPAN in The Netherlands has provided the model for this initiative, which is being led by Alexander Wever (*right*).



## New migratory fish pass for Swedish hydropower plant



At the Herting Hydropower plant on the River Atran in Sweden, a new low-sloping rack (at 30 degrees) leading to a bypass offers promising results for the migration of both eels and salmon.

## Scotland to Sargasso: eel education on the Clyde

In June 2015, pupils from North Lanarkshire became the first in Scotland to release European eels into the wild in a pilot run of a new Clyde River Foundation project called *Scotland to Sargasso*. Based on the Avon Wildlife Trust's *Spawn to be Wild* project, *Scotland to Sargasso* involves placing a part of the life cycle of the eel directly into schools to raise awareness of this critically endangered species.

Pupils from Chryston Primary School (Primary 3/4) and St Dominic's Primary School in Airdrie (Primary 6) raised eels in their classrooms for a few weeks before releasing them into their local rivers in the River Clyde catchment (the Bothlin Burn and North Calder Water, respectively) to allow them to continue their life cycle.

The glass eels used in the project were collected from the River Parrett and taken to Bridgwater College where they were fed in a specialist facility before making their journey to Scotland. Once in school, the eels were cared for by pupils and provided a focus for learning about life cycles, development, migration and conservation.



Primary pupils from Chryston Primary School

Dr William Yeomans, Catchment Manager for the Clyde River Foundation said: "We are delighted to have delivered this type of project in Scotland for the first time. We are currently seeking sponsorship and funding opportunities to develop the project further and to enable more schools to take part in this wonderful learning experience."

[Update from Scotland: Plans are being made to hold an eel conference in Inverness in summer 2016.](#)

## New screens planned for eels on the Thames

Thames Water has embarked on an ambitious programme to meet the requirements of the Eel Regulations. Over the next five years the company will install 13 new screens at river intakes on the River Thames and River Lea in addition to altering site operating procedures at key locations and supporting eel research and development projects. In addition to protecting eels the screens will also prevent other fish being drawn into the water treatment works.

The programme represents a significant investment and is the largest of its kind being undertaken by any water company in the UK. The programme has been in development for the last three years and having already altered operating procedures at one site and supported the Zoological Society Citizen Science Programme in 2015, Thames Water plan to start construction of the first screen in March 2016.



Visualisation of the Eel Screen at Walton-on-Thames, England

Thames Water Environmental expert Matt Hart said: “We rely on the River Thames and the River Lea to help us supply water to our 15 million customers across London and the Thames Valley so it’s important we look after it and all the species that depend on it too. Eel numbers have been dropping across Europe since the 1980s meaning they’re now classed as endangered so, to meet with regulations, we’re installing screens to stop them and other fish being pulled into our water treatment works.”

## Citizen Scientists count eels on the Thames

The team at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) have been monitoring the upstream migration of eel in the Thames catchment since 2005. From 2011, with thanks to the involvement of over 500 Citizen Scientists, the monitoring project has expanded from 4 to 13 sites in 2015. The project now represents the largest, most wide-ranging study on eel migration through a single catchment in the UK.

The strategy is to monitor for 3 years at sites low down on tributaries of the Thames and then start to move upstream. Having multiple sites in the Thames region allows the project to compare catch data across sites and identify sites with lower than anticipated eel recruitment. Low catches may indicate barriers to migration are located downstream and can be used as evidence to secure funding to build eel passes.



Eels offer fascinating research opportunities—and you don’t have to be a trained scientist to take part

Since 2013 ZSL, in partnership with others, have built eight eel passes in the region, opening 21 hectares of habitat to eel. The project is delivered in partnership with the Environment Agency’s eel management plan and 14 partnership organisations.

This experience could be used as a model for others to use and develop as required in other locations around the country, such is the scale of data required to achieve meaningful results in this sort of monitoring. The challenge is now to build the partnerships required to mobilise citizen scientists around the country.

## Collaborative Eel Protection: Bristol Water

Bristol Water is still in the early stages of its five year National Environment Programme (NEP). The NEP has targets for the water company to open up migratory pathways and screen abstraction points to prevent entrainment under the Eels (England & Wales) Regulation 2009. This is directly linked to Bristol Water's targets to improve biodiversity and create a sustainable environmental impact.

An investigation is currently looking at alternative measures in the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. The Littleton Intake requires fully compliant screens which are being costed up ready for detailed design, however screening at the Purton Intake was found not to be cost effective. Key stakeholders within the catchment have joined with Bristol Water to form the Severn Eel Group including the Sustainable Eel Group, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Canal & River Trust and the Severn Rivers Trust. Where we have schemes requiring us to deliver alternative measures we are hoping to work together to create new habitat and carry out restocking to help restore eel populations.



Patric Bulmer from Bristol Water

Already contributing to alternative measures, *Spawn to be Wild*, the water company's school project is designed to educate and act as a restocking exercise for our lakes and has just won a Green Apple for Best Environmental Practice.

Patric Bulmer, Head of Environment Strategy, will be at the IFM conference in Peterborough talking about the challenges faced by the water company, with examples of how excellent partnership working will ensure conservation of the eel and success of the company's regulatory schemes.

## First catch your eels: practical solutions for monitoring eel numbers

Fisheries Scientist Dr Robert Rosell has developed a low-cost net solution for sampling glass eels in Northern Ireland – a technique that could be used within citizen science projects elsewhere.

A simple but effective eel 'sampler' can be made using a curtain of square soft mesh gathered onto a piece of wire at the top and cut to ribbons up from the base. This is surrounded by a mesh 'skirt' and hung in the water.

Samplers are located in the water at a point where eels cannot pass, for example at the exit from a freshwater pond with flap valves that close at high water. Once a week the sampler is scooped up into a fine mesh net, and eels shaken out and counted carefully. The eels can then be moved to their destination. So far this method has successfully caught up to 1000 eels in a sampler in a day.



A simple glass eel sampler

## No 'endangered' designation for eels in North America

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has decided not to list the American eel as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Whilst acknowledging the threats to eels from harvest and hydroelectric facilities, the Service declared that the eel's single population is stable overall and not in danger of extinction (endangered) or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future (threatened). The Service reported that: "While individual American eels still face local mortality from harvest and hydroelectric facilities, these stressors are not threatening the overall species. Additionally, these effects have been, and are being, reduced by harvest quotas and mechanisms restoring eel passage up- and downstream."