

A list of delegates is provided with these notes and on the website

Andrew Kerr SEG Chairman's welcome

Andrew welcomed the delegates, newcomers and regular attendees. SEG works by bringing diverse interest together from commercial, conservation and science, all with a common interest in restoring the European Eel.

Despite some slight improvements in glass eel recruitment in the last 4 years, the European Eel is far from recovered. Continued, co-ordinated and sustained effort is still needed.

Some good news & progress:

- The Arzal fishery has achieved the SEG Standard. There is re-newed French commitment to sustainability and the probability of creating a France SEG soon.
- There is increasing adoption of eel passage solutions across Europe
- Support from conservation & science to the SEG agenda is dependent on the industry demonstrating its commitment to responsibility via adoption of the Standard.
- Andrew explained the SEG Theory of Change diagram
- The Initiative zur Förderung des Europäischen Aals (IFEA) in Germany, which is generating funding for eel conservation

Challenges:

- Funding - to keep the SEG agenda viable
- Illegal exports – to combat

Willem Dekker's address

“Without international steering, nobody will protect the eel” – analysis of the steering models governing the eel across Europe. 15 minutes for Questions

Biggest problems:

- Thousands of dams, sluices, hydropower, pumps
- 10,000 fisherman
- 50% of the catch in Europe is illegally exported to Asia

The decline in production (catches) started in the 1960s. Aquaculture now makes up the majority (65%) of production.

1980 was a turning point for a sudden decline in glass eel recruitment, though we still don't really understand why.

Willem presented 'Typology of Steering Models'. The theory of 'Distributing Control' steered the formulation of the Eel Regulation 2007, whereby the EU set a common goal, and nation states were required to set national eel management plans to meet that goal. Whilst not perfect, it has provided the most effective instrument so far to conserve the eel.

The EU could control the protection of the stock in the short term. But without better knowledge of the real status of the stock and the reasons for it, it cannot control the recovery.

Summary: 'Distributing control and orchestration are the key to deal with extreme complexity'.

Questions:

Should we seek to partition and balance the impacts across different sectors – eg. fishing & hydropower? Also better to work to short-term goals which are easier to measure progress against. – eg. focus on reducing mortality, not achieving 40% escapement; or goals that help to achieve the long term (where we know that it is contributing – eg. it could be that climate change is the biggest factor, which we can no longer control). Consensus was yes – we should focus on achievable short-term goals.

Re-inventing the fishery and industry

Alex Koelewijn presented his views on recovering the eel and the livelihoods that depend on them – something that has been in his family for 500 years.

Key notes:

- we all have to work together to achieve a sustainable stock and fisheries.
- Businesses have a moral and financial interest in maintaining and improving the stock.
- SEG should be aiming for full traceability of commercially fished stocks and to highlight where they are not.

ISEAL Programme

Matthew Wenban-Smith described the principles behind ISEAL, that help organisations develop and demonstrate their sustainability credibility and effectiveness.

The likely target for Associate membership is December 2017.

The most recent phase has been focussing on Governance, the Assurance programme (Standard), Standards procedure, and the Theory of Change (the logic of what SEG is trying to achieve). The future of the eel will depend on the 10,000 – 13,000 people who depend on the eel - to do something positive to protect and restore them.

The next phase will be to review the Standard to achieve its new stated aims; Monitoring & evaluation; Assurance programme, and then apply for ISEAL membership.

AGM business (members only)

David Bunt presented:

- The SEG Annual Report. This was accepted by the members
- The SEG Accounts. This was accepted by the members. There were questions on (1) how and when SEG funding would become more sustainable; Andrew replied that there are several initiatives underway with the objective to provide sustainable funding. And (2) if achievement of ISEAL membership would guarantee greater buy-in to the SEG agenda by organisations such as WWF and Greenpeace; Andrew replied that this was not guaranteed, but he hoped and believed that the collective outcome of SEG's efforts would result in our greater universal credibility.
- The new Articles of Association. This was accepted by the membership. Queries were made about (1) if the new quorate number should increase, as the number of Directors had increased and (2) that the term 'Director' and 'Member' sometimes seemed interchangeable and therefore confusing. Andrew committed that SEG would review those sections and, if necessary, seek an amendment at the next AGM.
- Alexander Wever volunteered to become the member's secretary.

Stopping the Illegal Trade or Trafficking in eels

Florian Stein presented findings of an investigation into tracing the destination of traded eel.

Out of 214M glass legally eels caught in 2016, ~100M (~50%) did not go to a recognised / legal market.

All seizures so far have been traced back to Spanish airports. Why Spain? (1) Because the Spanish authorities are focusing effort on this and (2) because there is a substantial market for eating glass eels in Spain – which makes good cover for illegal trade.

Ricardo Santos, MEP for Azores and Commissioner for Sargasso Sea was unable to travel today. He was able to record and post a video, in which he declared his passionate interest in this enigmatic species, and his dismay at the high degree of illegal trafficking of eel to Asia.

Ricardo signed a declaration to 'Stop Illegal Trafficking of Illegal Eel' and asked the conference to do the same.

There followed a Panel Discussion led by Andrew with questions from the delegates about the illegal trade. The Panel consisted of: Vicki Crook TRAFFIC, Florian Stein, Alexandre Chailleux Telecapeche, Vin Fleming CITES, Benat Hoiz, from the Adour, France, Martin Sims UK NWCU.

- French attendees claimed that France has a fully traceable system. But there is no visibility between collectors/wholesalers and the next customer.
- Telecapeche will launch a new version in spring 2017 that will include traders to the transparent/traceable supply chain. This obviously has great potential for a future European approach

Wikipedia and other social media a SEG approach

Alexander Wever reported how Wikipedia presents different stories about the eel depending on which country's website you view it from. Would like us to consider how we can help Wikipedia be more up to date and consistent. Really need independent scientist(s) to help form a consensus. Andrew suggested a working party of 3 (1 from each arm) to develop: Alexander, Cy and maybe a IUCN member.

Progress with INTEREG funding & Alternative Measures

Barry Bendall and Laurence Couldrick reported on progress they've recently made with funding bids for conservation projects that SEG are partners for.

Wetlands International European Association

Cy Griffin described the aims of Wetlands International and how Wetlands International might want to adopt the eel as a flagship species for water conservation policy. 'What is good for the eel is good for wetlands and people'.

IFM International Eel Science Symposium, ZSL, London, June 2017

Diary dates: 13 – 15 June 2017.

Andrew closed the meeting at 16.00 with two key conclusions from the day:

1. Everyone is calling for Traceability as a solution to the illegal trade and to help demonstrate responsibility and credibility to a more socially aware market. So, let's all act for full Traceability!
2. Let's set short-term objectives to support our longer term goal, as they will be easier to measure, achieve and demonstrate progress