



## SEG Standard Assurance System Public Report



Sustainable  
Eel Group

### Our Purpose

The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) population is at a historic low and its population has fallen by 90 – 95% since the 1960s. It was once very common and widely spread across its range in Europe, North Africa and Scandinavia. It supported fishing, trade and livelihoods as it provided food and supported diversity of cultures and traditions. It plays an important role in aquatic ecosystems.

**Our primary purpose is for the recovery of the European eel, with multiple benefits to the ecosystems, communities, traditions and economies that rely on it.**

### The SEG Standard

The Sustainable Eel Group (SEG) Standard is one of the strategies in our [Theory of Change](#) to make our contribution towards the protection and recovery of the eel. It is a '*Best Practice Code of Conduct for a Responsible Eel Sector*' and is a series of criteria to identify whether those fishing and trading in the European eel can claim to do so 'responsibly'. It is a voluntary certification scheme to improve practices.

The principal and defined aim of the SEG standard is to:

**Define criteria by which each step in the chain of custody in the commercial eel sector can be assessed for its responsible minimisation of negative impacts and contribution to the protection and recovery of the eel population.**

The standard is now in its 7<sup>th</sup> version and published on the [SEG website](#).

### Assurance System Structure

The SEG Standard is assured as follows:

- SEG is the scheme owner and is ultimately responsible for its content and operation.
- To avoid and reduce the risks of potential conflicts of interest, SEG the assurance process (assessments against the standard and the award of certificates) is contracted out to an independent, third party 'Conformity Assessment Body' (CAB).
- CABs are accredited by SEG according to certain criteria, for example compliance with the relevant ISO Standard ISO 17065.
- CABs use qualified auditors to undertake assessments against the standard. They may employ them directly or use freelance auditors.
- Accredited CABs are listed on the [SEG website](#).
- The full criteria by which CABs are accredited and the system operated is defined in our document [202 Assurance System](#).

## The Assurance System Simplified

Whilst the Assurance System is described in full in our document [202 Assurance System](#), this is a shorter and simpler overview:

### Structure and including decision-making

- Assurance is provided by an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party [Conformity Assessment Body](#) under contract and oversight by the Sustainable Eel Group.
- The CAB makes decisions on certification according to assessments, though may in some circumstances be required to refer cases to the SEG Board.
- Those seeking certification under the SEG standard are termed 'clients'.

### Data ownership

- Clients under assessment own the data they provide.
- When developed into audit reports the data and audit report become under ownership by the CAB. However, data confidentiality legislation requires that no personal or sensitive data are revealed without permission.
- Consequently, SEG publishes only the outcomes of audit reports and any certificates issued on the [Register of SEG Certificates](#).

### To be accepted as registered CAB for SEG, assurance providers must:

- Be ISO 17065 certified, or have accreditation for other similar standards, e.g. as MSC or ASC.
- Undergo SEG Standard Assurance training.
- Have jurisdiction to operate as in the countries where clients operate.
- Approved CABs are published on the SEG website on the [Register of SEG CABs](#).
- Approved auditors are listed on the SEG website on the register of [SEG Accredited Assessors](#).

### To be accepted as an applicant a client must:

- Commit to the SEG standard's objectives, principles and [terms and conditions](#).
- Apply to the CAB to become a client to undergo assessment.
- Conduct a self-assessment, with a charge of approx. € 100.
- Undergo a full independent audit.
- Pay the appropriate assessment fee, which can vary between € 500 and € 5000 depending on the size and complexity of the business, but is typically approx. € 2500.
- Clients only become SEG certified when they meet the requirements of the standard as assessed by the CAB.

### Assessment methodology

- Firstly, there is self assessment using an on-line self evaluation tool. This helps and requires the client to understand the SEG standard – what it means and what they must achieve. The self assessment also helps the client and auditor to prepare for the audit.
- All clients must be evaluated against Component 1, which is a core set of requirements, applicable to all – for example: good traceability record keeping
- Then there are different audits for different components of the standard, depending on what role the client plays in the supply chain for the eel. For example, fishers have a very different series of criteria to fulfil than an eel farm.
- Most first audits are undertaken on site.
- Audits are conducted by a qualified and accredited auditor.
- Audits involve a tour or explanation of the client's operations to understand the business, examination of records and documentation, e.g. to demonstrate the traceability of batches of eels, and a series of questions to identify and acquire evidence of complying with the standard
- To achieve certification, clients must comply with all criteria in Component 1, and then at least 50% at the higher 'responsible' level in all other Components relevant to their organisation.

- Certificates are valid for four years. However, that is dependent on repeat 'surveillance' monitoring, intervals for which are every 1 – 4 years, determined by a risk matrix, but are typically every 2 years. Repeat audits can often be done remotely.
- Auditors make their recommendations on decisions about certification to the CAB according to the scoring methodology criteria set out in the [SEG Standard](#) and the [Assurance System](#).
- The CAB reviews and the recommendation of the auditor and conveys the final decision, including the provision of a certificate, to the client.
- The CAB / auditor provides draft assessment reports to the client for comment and final reports once agreed.

### Stakeholder input

- Stakeholders can provide comments and feedback on the assurance process at any time, to any of the auditor, CAB or SEG.
- Formal consultation on the assurance process is conducted when the SEG standard is reviewed in full, usually every five years (the last in 2023). All stakeholders are invited to comment in an open and extensive consultation process.
- Stakeholders who have relevant information are invited to input to individual assessments.
- Any stakeholder can complain at any time about anything SEG related, including assurance and certificates issued, by enacting our [Complaints Procedure](#).

### Non-conformities

- Any non-conformity in Component 1 will lead to non-certification.
- Any major non-conformity in other Components will lead to non-certification.
- More than 50% minor non-conformities in other Components will lead to the client being categorised as *Aspiring*, where they have up to 2 years to make the improvements to be certified as *Responsible*.
- Clients have time-limited opportunities to connect non-conformities to achieve certification.
- The decisions and outcomes are described in full in section 5.13 of [202 Assurance System](#).

### Other standards

- Where a client is certified to similar or partly equivalent certification schemes, we accept them if the scheme is a Community Member of [ISEAL](#), or is ISEAL Code Compliant.
- Examples of the recognition of other schemes in the SEG standard are Chain of Custody and Sustainability of Fish Feed in the [MSC](#), [ASC](#) and [Marin Trust](#) standards.

### Certified clients

- On certification by the CAB, SEG maintains a [Register of SEG Certificates](#).
- The register identifies the client name, certificate number, type of business, contact details and the name of the auditor, issue and expiry date.
- It also provides access to a copy of the certificate which has further basic information about the results of assessments of each clients and assurance providers

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For further information please see:

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