



Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

Public Statement



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.

Defining the intended change

Long-term outcomes

SEG's Vision is:

Biologically safe wild eel populations, distributed throughout their natural range, fulfilling their role in the aquatic environment, recovering in line with the protection targeted by the EC Eel Regulation.

To help achieve this, as described in our Mission is:

To provide the respected leadership alliance that enables and promotes the joined-up conservation and management of the eel in the Member States of Europe and across the eel's range, linking all interests in an open and effective process to achieve SEG's Vision.

Short and Medium Term Outcomes

Our shorter term outcomes are to:

- Define, promote and encourage best practice fishing (via the SEG standard)
- Reduce the illegal trade of European eel to Asia
- Enable adequate levels of restocking to support eel management plans
- Gain independent recognition for our strategies and the SEG standard
- To improve the traceability of eels sold; back to their source
- Increase investment in eel conservation programmes and scientific studies.

Our strategies are described in more detail in our [Theory of Change](#).

Scope and boundaries of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) System

Aims and Objectives - our intended sustainability impacts in support of that change

Social

- Greater engagement of all stakeholders interested in the European eel
- Illegal eel trade is minimised (ultimate goal is 0%)
- An increasing proportion (ultimate goal 100%), of eel fishing, trade and consumption demonstrates its commitment to protection and responsible use by meeting the SEG standard
- The Sustainable Eel Group is a successful advocate of eel protection, responsible use and recovery with governments and stakeholders.

Environmental

- Protection for the European eel achieves the target of 40% survival
- Barriers to migration are removed or adequately mitigated, initially to meet the 25,000km river target in the Swimways Network by 2030
- Wetland habitats are restored to increase the quantity, quality and connectivity of the aquatic environment for eels.

Economic

- The damaging effects of water operations to eel populations are minimised
- The livelihoods of those that fish and trade responsibly in eel are maintained.

Geographical scope

SEG's MEL system is limited to its coastal and freshwater range primarily in Europe and Scandinavia as this is where data and information are best known and where, via the European Commission and our network, our activities have most influence. We will expand this to and middle eastern countries on the Mediterranean and North African countries as data, information and networks improve there.

Unintended effects

It is difficult to predict the unintended effects of a programme. These are those where we have identified them. They are described in more detail in our [MEL System](#) (section 6.5):

Originally identified in 2018

- Demand for consumption of certified eel might become greater than the market can supply, putting up prices or putting pressure on stocks.
- Cost of participation (assessment and certification) may be a barrier for some.
- Legitimate, responsible fishing may increase the 'cover' for illegal fishing.
- Some fisheries or practices may not be able to meet the standard and they may feel the only option is to sell to uncertified or even illegal markets.

Discovered since

- As not all operators have been able to gain certification, some have perceived and complained that the scheme is creating a monopoly.

Potential in 2023

Newly identified unintended effects in 2023 are:

- As SEG has revised its standard in 2023 it has discovered and prepared for the unexpected effects of the EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

Organisational strategies, and their contribution to intended outcomes and impacts

SEG employs multiple strategies to achieve its aims and objectives:

Advocacy and influencing

- SEG aims to be highly influential in the European Commission and national government policies that affect the aquatic environment and the eel,
- SEG develops and builds its credibility based on using a balanced collaboration of scientists, conservationists and the commercial sector to develop and present its views in the most compelling way.

The SEG Standard

- Implementation of the SEG standard aims to adopt best practice across the sector
- The SEG and ESF labelling schemes aim to provide assurance and choice to retailers consumers who wish to buy responsibly
- The labelling schemes and associated marketing aim to develop a market demand for certified, responsibly sourced eel and so encourage further adoption of the standard
- Assessments against the standard are performed by accredited third party auditors via an independent Conformity Assessment Body (CAB).
- The CAB is subject to oversight by SEG as defined in our [Assurance System](#), e.g. assessment reports are assessed by SEG as part of our monitoring and oversight role.
- This ensures that assessments are of a high quality, carried out consistently and without bias.

Collaborative and partnership working for science and conservation programmes

- SEG is a small NGO and must work in partnership with others to be most effective at garnering knowledge
- We work with scientists, conservation organisations and government agencies to influence, gain funding and manage projects that will directly help eel populations or scientific knowledge.

Performance monitoring

Performance monitoring includes:

Measuring **long term impacts**, such as:

- the status of eel populations
- the status of aquatic ecosystems
- the effect on traditional forms of eel fishing and eating eel.

Measuring **short and medium term impacts**, such as:

- the level of best practice fishing and trading – by the take-up of the SEG standard
- the level of illegal trade
- the level of restocking of juvenile eels from areas of high abundance to under-populated areas.

The programme also measures the effectiveness of the SEG standard, with key performance indicators for each of its components.

Performance monitoring involves the collection of data and information from fisheries, traders and other businesses in the sector, through assessment reports, market surveys and direct contact. Published information will also be sourced, e.g. from the ICES Working Group on Eel annual reports.

The measures and targets for these are presented in our [MEL Plan](#).

Outcome and impact evaluation

SEG produces an Annual Impacts Report at our Annual General Meeting and these are published at:

- [Board minutes & reports | Sustainable Eel Group](#)

SEG has produced a number of its own papers to understand the eel sector and eel science better. They also include at least one independent evaluation report per year. These reports are published at:

- [SEG Reports | Sustainable Eel Group](#)

Roles and responsibilities

The design and operation of the MEL system is the ultimate responsibility of the SEG Board. That is delegated, with oversight, to the MEL Team.

The MEL Team is managed by David Bunt (Director of Conservation Operations). It is responsible for:

- Designing the MEL system
- Collating data and information and reporting on the measures in the MEL framework
- Reviewing and improving the MEL system.

Improving the effectiveness of the MEL system

Our MEL system has been in operation since 2018 and has adapted with learning since. In 2023 we have undertaken a substantial review. [The MEL System](#) describes our new system, and our [MEL Plan](#) sets our proposed upgraded monitoring and learning plan. We consulted on this in January – February 2024 to refine it further and improvements continue with annual reviews.

With feedback from partners, stakeholders, contributors, our own experiences and an annual system management review, we gain and implement the learning of:

- The most efficient and effective processes and mechanisms to collect the data
- The most useful and informative data to collect and report
- The most informative and accessible ways to present the reports.

This improvement process will continue as we apply our new MEL System and Plan and the feedback from consultation.

Opportunities for engagement

Procedures and opportunities for stakeholder engagement

Feedback on our MEL system is welcome at any time by email to: standard@sustainableeelgroup.org

The existing MEL framework was initially developed with stakeholders during consultation of the SEG standard V6 in its review from February 2017 to June 2018. This was repeated in the 2023 review to version 7 and the review and consultation process is published on the SEG website [here](#).

SEG provided specific responses to participants on comments received and a full log is published [here](#).

Stakeholders can also access and comment on our reports published at:

- [Board minutes & reports | Sustainable Eel Group](#) and
- [SEG Reports | Sustainable Eel Group](#)

Contact point for submission of comments or complaints about MEL

For any comments or requests for information, contact: standard@sustainableeelgroup.org

For our complaints procedure see [here](#) and contact: info@sustainableeelgroup.org