## The Sustainable Eel Group

## Notes of the meeting 9 November 2009 at Fishmongers Hall, London

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| **Present:** | Andrew Kerr | (AK) | Independent (Management Consultant) | (Chair) |
| | David Bunt | (DB) | Institute of Fisheries Management | (Secretary) |
| | Brian Knights | (BK) | Independent (Fisheries Scientist) | |
| | Heidi Stone | (HS) | Environment Agency | |
| | Andy Don | (AD) | Environment Agency | |
| | Miran Aprahamian | (MA) | Environment Agency | |
| | Paul Knight | (PK) | Salmon & Trout Association | |
| | Roger Castle | (RC) | Eel Fisherman | |
| | Chetal Moghraby | (CM) | Defra | |
| | Peter Wood | (PW) | UK Glass Eels | |
| | Alan Walker | (AW) | Cefas | |
| | Chris Leftwich | (CL) | Fishmongers Company | |
| | Keith Wilson | (KW) | London Port Authority | |
| | Robert Rosell | (RR) | Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute, Northern Ireland | |

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| **Apologies**: | Vin Fleming | Joint Nature Conservation Committee |
| | Maldwin Drummond | Fishmongers' Company |
| | Matthew Gollock | Eel Conservation Group |

**Minutes** **Action**

**Welcome**

- Nigel Cox, Clerk, welcomed the group to Fishmongers Hall.
- Andrew Kerr welcomed the group, thanking them for attending. He outlined the reason for setting up the group, having been inspired by the Eel Conference in Bridgwater in April 2009, to seek a way to form a body that would best represent the interests of the eel

**1. Setting up the body**

- Paul Knight asked whether the eel was really in decline, having detected differing views around the table. After discussion it was concluded that the European regulation requires us to do something for the eel, whether we agree about the exact status of eel stocks or not. The eel regulation gives it political status that it did not enjoy just a few years ago. It's a tool in a bigger tool box that we need to use to best effect. There is a general consensus across Europe that Eel Stocks are in decline and require human intervention to reverse what is perceived to be a mostly man-made effect.
- It was recognised that we can only intervene in fresh and coastal waters.
- The group will be more influential if our actions can benefit other species at the same time
- The eel is unlikely to become extinct, but eel fishing/fishermen may become extinct in short or long term (and difficult to replace)
- We will need to consider legal constitution of group to be able to lobby for European funding
- The Interface between fishing and aquaculture will also be an important consideration.

**1.1 Aim & objectives**

At the Chairman's invitation, each person shared their interest in the eel and their hopes and aspirations for the Group (see Appendix 1). The words used, particularly those commonly used, would form the basis of a Purpose Statement (Aims & Objectives) for the Group.

- Alan Walker proposed a statement with which there was general agreement (see below).

A sub-group of Andrew Kerr, Heidi Stone and David Bunt will meet to develop a draft Aims & Objectives for consultation. AK, DB, HS

***Preliminary statement*** – with words provided so far:

- Aim:
  An independent forum for the joined up conservation and management of the eel in the UK, linking stakeholders and managers in all the processes
  Objectives:
  - Well regulated sustainable commercial fishery that supports local economies.
  - Meet objectives of Eel Regulation.
  - Develop, decipher and apply sound science to enable effective decision making
  - Influence government on policy
  - Effective at seeking income and resources to progress the aim of the group

- Peter Wood felt that if it was not possible to gain unanimous agreement to the statement, that any agreement should be recorded, rather than hinder the Group's progress. Andrew Kerr agreed, but was optimistic that there was a common view around the table for what we mean by sustainable fisheries management.

**1.2 Organisational model**

The Group discussed how to best be organised and constituted to be effective. Comments and guiding principles were:

- We don't want a bureaucratic model, but must also be effective. We may need to be a Society, Trust, Limited Co., Charitable status?
- Independent organisations have more flexible funding rules - so govt. agencies can contract work to them with greater flexibility to spend outside of the financial year.
- May be worth considering if can tie in with an organisation that is not single species – eg. Rivers Trusts – though risk of losing the voice & focus on your objective.
- If setting up a charity - will be a lot more effort to set up a charity from scratch, rather than from an existing association. Cost is likely to be in the range £2k - £20k.
- Funding bodies like EA won't provide funding until/unless they can see the organisation is viable – but is rather chicken and egg – as it may not be possible to be viable without some initial funding.
- Could we contract another body eg. Association of Rivers Trusts for their expertise and administration and make use of their viability.
- Andrew Kerr has been discussing with the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). Not clear yet what their funding might be – they are willing to meet us advise / discuss.
- Paul Knight suggested forming a limited co., as can be done quickly and inexpensively. EFF will trade with a Limited Co., but there must also be a good audit trail and, to get match funding, it means we will need to find independent funding. EFF won't fund administration – only projects, research etc.
- The consensus, and agreed way forward, was to investigate whether It may be possible to set the group up as a sub-group of an existing credible body, and then separate when it shows itself to be viable. Paul Knights said this had been done successfully with the Riverfly project within Salmon & Trout Association, and would be willing to consider this for this Group if other leads were not successful. Other potential bodies to consider are: (1) Institute of Fisheries Management (David Bunt to investigate [consider risk of the IFM's apolitical status v being a lobbying/influential body]); (2) Association of Rivers Trusts PK DB
- Peter Wood offered some resources to the Group, ie. admin/office/treasury/website resource & experience. Others offered time and some organisations present might be able to provide seed funding.

**Group composition**

The Chairman invited the Group to list any organisations missing from today that we should invite. It was agreed that we should be as inclusive as possible, to ensure that we as many views as possible are catered for. It was recognised that not all organisations would want to or be able to attend all meetings. Suggestions were:

- A front bench MP in the next government – eg. Richard Benyon (Newbury) via Michael Lunn. Chris Leftwich offered to provide those contact details — CL
- Processor / buyer in the commercial eel fishery – eg. Jesse Patterson, Cooks (Forest of Dean – Peter Wood offered to provide those contact details. — PW
- Yellow eel fisherman in East Anglia [eg. the person who was on TV with Gryff Rhys Jones on The One Show], or Roger Castle offered to provide Mike Foster's number to seek that contact. — RC, DB
- Anglers: National Anguilla Club
- Scotland: Louise Donnelly (Scottish Govt)? Chetal Moghraby offered to provide a suitable contact. — CM
- Wales: Chetal offered to contact Arfon Williams in the National Assembly Wales — CM
- Robert Rosell offered to invite a contact in the Lough Neagh Fisheries Co-operative — RR
- EA Regional Fisheries, Ecology, Recreation Advisory Committee (RFERAC) Chair – Ivor Llewellyn — DB
- Conservation organisation interests: RSPB, - Natural England? - Ask Vin Fleming the best way to gain Conservation interest/input — DB
- Thames Estuary partnership – Jill Goddard? Keith Wilson offered to contact — KW

**1.3 Management**

This item was deferred. There is nothing yet to manage, though several organisations and individuals offered time and resource to assist, and, as outlined in 1.3 we do not yet have an agreed organisational model.

**2. Information exchange**

The Group took shared information and developments in recent months:-

**2.1 Eel management plans (Environment Agency, Defra)**

- The UK eel management plans are being considered by Defra. They hope to be approved in early December
- A number of EU countries have had theirs approved

**2.2 New EA byelaws (Environment Agency)**

- New statutes are coming into place. For example, after 16 December – all new structures in rivers will require eel passes; there will be a prioritisation programme for legacy structures
- There will be changes to the open seasons for glass eel and silver eel fishing, as well as other byelaw changes. Fishing for scientific (monitoring) reasons will also be included in some cases. A letter is to go to all commercial eel fishermen soon — HS
- Eel fishing licences will in future be by River Basin District, not Region
- Will move from "licences" to "authorisations" - there is greater flexibility to refuse an authorisation if necessary
- If eel management plans are not approved it is possible for the EU to require for there to be a 50% reduction in fishing catch, or reduction in effort that has an equivalent effect (NB. if the Glass eel fishery was stopped it would impact ability to implement stocking elements of Lough Neagh's eel management plan)

**2.3 ICES Eel Working Group**

- The 2009 Eel Working Group report is now available on the ICES website. It has two main recommendations:
    - All negative anthropogenic factors to be reduced as far as possible ASAP
    - Eel needs a pan-European group equivalent to NASCO
- It also reports even further reduction in Glass eel recruitment in 2009
- The Eel Working Group continues to review and report on the use of glass eel for stocking. It should be noted, however that ICES itself, in taking the WGeel report and using it as a basis to advise the European Commission, does not endorse the use of glass eels for stocking.
- CITES noted that there had been a sharp decline in glass eel catches for the 2008/09 season, and considered how this could be reflected in export quotas for 2009/10. The Commission proposed that the quota was cut by 50% from what it should have been when agreed by the Scientific Review Group (SRG) in March 2009. A number of Member States argued for a zero quota, but one MS argued that the recent reduction in catch might be due to unfavourable climatic and socio-economic factors. However, the Committee did agree to adopt the Commission's 50% cut. Therefore, the national export quota for 09/10 would amount to 21.5% of the catch level in 2007/08 (instead of 43%), and that future quota levels would be reviewed on the basis of continuing updates on glass eel catches.
- It was also reinforced that exports could only be allowed in the 09/10 season where Eel Management Plans had been approved and implemented

**2.4 Forthcoming fishing season**

- Production in Portugal seems to have gone down so far this season. The indication from France is similar.

**2.5 Progress in Europe**

- France has not yet had its Eel management plans approved
- European Angling Alliance has decreed that all rod caught eels to be returned
- Norway going for 80% reduction in all eel fishing
- Eire has gone for a total ban in commercial fishing

**2.6 EFF and Eel funding grants**

- Invite EFF's Steve Bailey to the next meeting – though likely to get as much from a 1:1 meeting, so consider that too — AK
- Productive outcomes from this meeting would be helpful in influencing the EFF
- Look at other possible funding routes – recognise that all will be very resource intensive. British Airways & Waitrose are potential sponsors. — AK
- The agreed aims & objectives will be a pre-requisite to putting a funding plan together to then approach funding organisations.
- Eel is a BAP species, and there is no Eel BAP Group. This group might be able to fulfil that role. Heidi Stone to investigate. — HS

**3. Summary**

Andrew Kerr thanked everyone for their contribution. He commented how positive and enthusiastic everyone had been, and how much agreement and consensus there was between such a wide variety of participants.

**4. Next meeting:** 11 January 2010, London. Venue to be decided and arranged. — DB

**Sustainable Eel Group** **Hopes & Expectations** **Appendix 1**

**AK**
- An influential body
- Ability to engage with and gain resources from funding bodies

**BK**
- Ensure we have sound science
- Determine what research needs to be undertaken to fill the important gaps in our knowledge
- Decisions to be based on sound science

**RC**
- Not have knee-jerk reactions based on un-sound science which may become mistakes we cannot undo

**PW**
- Share knowledge
- Apply pressure in the right places

**CM**
- Ensure Defra policies are in keeping with sound science and the views of this group/key stakeholders

**HS**
- Recognise not a level playing field between countries within Europe
- Currently at a crossroads – eel Management Plans, byelaw changes
- Improved data & monitoring required
- Need an influential, independent & representative group

**MA**
- Group to help implement Eel Recovery Plans
- Secure resources to implement eel Recovery Plans

**KW**
- Observer – London Port Authority. Has contacts with commercial fishermen that might be useful

**CL**
- Facilitate meeting (Fishmongers)
- Lobby body must be inclusive – but must also balance with lots of members = many views to consider & balance
- Keen to see sustainability for eel & consumer

**AW**
- An independent forum for the joined up conservation and management of the eel in the UK, linking stakeholders and managers in all the processes

**AD**
- Raise profile of the eel
- Increase funding for improvements

**PK**
- Due to life-cycle between see and fresh water, similar issues as for salmon & sea trout
- Worth considering eel in terms of Water Framework Directive – ie. the whole environment and not in Fisheries silo – for example, consider the multi-environmental factors surrounding hydropower
- Working together can be very powerful, but take care over our expectations

**RR**
- Provide sound science to politicians and fishermen
- Understand better where different environmental and man-made factors affect eels
- Independent body to drive policy

**DB**
- To see a healthy and sustainable fishery – ie. for the species, a food resource and economy
- IFM willing to be an independent facilitator

**Common Themes:**

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| Influence | Resources | Policy |
| Independent | Inclusive | Representative |
| Sound science | | |
| Difficult | Challenge | |
| Management | Conservation | Sustainable |