**Board Meeting**

**23 April 2014 at Fishmongers Company, London**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Andrew Kerr, Jac Tijsen (NeVePaling, Holland), Alex Koelewijn (DUPAN Foundation, Holland), Chris Leftwich, Dr William O’Connor (Ireland), Brian Knights, Peter Neusinger, Stephen Mowat (ZSL), Matt Gollock (ZSL), Andy Don (EA), Richard Fordham (Sweden), Morten Lauritzen (Denmark), Simon Soffe

**Apologies:**

Arne Koops (Germany), Marc-Adrien Marcellier (France), David Bunt, Andrew Morgan, Barry Bendall, Alistair Maltby, Paul Coulson, Miran Aprahamian, Corine Rozendaal, Roger Castle, John Van Dooren, Mogens Mathiasen, Armando Piccinini (Italy), Rodolfo Barrera (Spain), Alan Walker, Peter Wood, Heidi Stone, Robert Rosell, Vin Fleming and Janina Gray.

**Actions**

# Introduction

The Chairman welcomed all with a summary of recent activity, including good news of abundant elver runs across the west coast Europe, but bad news of difficulties within the industry and commercial sector.

Andrew welcomed Stephen Mowet from ZSL, and thanked to Matt Gollock for years of commitment and support to SEG.

Andrew also welcomed Dr William O’Connor from Ireland, specifically the River Shannon basin district – and expressed SEG’s hope that it was the start of a longer partnership which would create progress for eel recovery in Ireland.

# 2. AGM

The Annual report was circulated to Board members before the meeting. It included reflections on 2009 and progress since, and the importance of conservation, community and commercial sectors coming together under the banner of sustainability for eel.

There continue to be difficulties working on projects in Southern Europe and getting projects going. New EMFF funding is approved in Brussels and will be in place from 2015 through until 2021.

Andrew reported on a recent meeting in Brussels with Isabelle Thomas MEP (April 2014) to find a way forward for the eel industry. It marked a significant step to engage with fishermen and share the issues on wider scale and in Brussels – a movement in the right direction. The French Ministry of Agriculturehas concurrently commissioned a Europe-wide market survey by a French consultancy to examine the industry and other factors surrounding sustainability. The report author (Pierre Etienne) had revealed an article that called for an Eel Standard in France, and therefore a lack of knowledge about the Sustainable Eel Standard already in place and starting to function in France.

Andrew will invite the report’s author to present to SEG when it’s published. Andrew

Andrew also highlighted how the EA are fully supporting SEG efforts at restocking in England, and showed images of the peak catches this year - 1kg per dip in many instances. Thanks were given to Peter Neusinger and his family for their support on restocking in the UK. The European restocking totals for 2013 were reviewed, and numbers for2014 discussed and forecast with hope that extra countries, like Poland, will be included this year.

Andrew closed with a review of the original SEG model, to reinforce the importance of communication and its effect on delivery and progress.

Chris Leftwich proposed adoption of Annual Report, which was accepted by the Board. With no other nominations put forward, Chris also proposed the Chairman and treasurer as existing post holders to continue, which was accepted.

# 3. Recruitment reports:

England: Report from RSPB Leighton Moss (not yet associated with SEG) quoted 2013 as the best year in 25 years with 51,000 counted, and forecasts a higher number in 2014.

Sweden: an annual scientific survey trawling in waters between Norway, Sweden and Denmark in February discovered a 700% increase in eels caught (albeit on a very small sample: 7 fish rather than 1!).

Denmark: has seen increase in eel numbers using electro fishing techniques.

Holland: large numbers of glas seels are at the coast. At one site where DUPAN Foundation is running a project, in only 4 nights with one dip net 79 kgs of glass eels were caught.

# 4. Standard update:

Chris Leftwich reported that the Standard Committee is waiting for reports to come through following assessments in France.

Andrew reported that a successful day had been hosted in February in Fishmongers Hall with chefs from London’s top restaurants and clubs. Orders to the Dutch Eel Company have subsequently increased to the most ever. He also recounted recent conversations with Fish2Fork about progress of the standard, and the supportive response.

Chris recommended that an independent review of the Standard be commissioned, and another company (not just MEP) be accredited to conduct assessments– giving freedom of choice and independence to suppliers.

Richard Fordham and Matt Gollock agreed, and suggested that the Committee recruit non UK assessors and subsequently provide a list of assessors on the SEG website so each organisation could chose its assessor. AK reported some Dutch companies (SGS) are looking into it. AK recommended at least one more assessor to add competition and more local access to keep transport and costs down. CL highlighted need to demonstrate transparency. AK cautioned that a full review will be costly and needs to be funded – potentially by bid from EFF in year 3.

It was agreed there will be further discussion of the Standard at the next meeting David / Chris

Reflecting again on the meeting with Isabelle Thomas MEP, Alex Koeleweijn noted the desire of some members of the French fishery to reopen European exports of glass eels to Asia, and the SEG response was to push the need for the strengthening of the Sustainable Standard and agenda – all rivers need to be achieving the 40% silver eel escapement.

RF and ML agreed, and reported how they were encouraged that the forum in Brussels was prepared to listen and therefore it had been a good opportunity to get message across about sustainability – and the need to move in that direction and stop just pressing for ex-EU exports before the recovery of the eel stock had been proven.

Alex gave an update on the balance calculation project in Holland, which is being peer reviewed by Wageningen University. The research will be used by separate water bodies in Holland to determine how much yellow and silver fishing is allowed for 40% escapement. This new approach will be usable in other countries, and is being done in tandem with the Dutch office of the European Coastal and Sea Union.

In the balance calculation, aquafarming of eels is also taken into account. Calculations are made to the point where human influences have no impact on the stock. Therefore a calculation is made which shows that it is manageable and economic to reduce human impact to zero by paying a fee on an eel product. That fee can be used for restocking, management and trap, transport and release projects for silver eels. For the wild eels fisheries, a specific report is made in the way the 40% escapement target will be taken in account - as mentioned in the EU 1100/2007. The balance calculation shows that some fisheries in some water bodies in the Netherlands are not sustainable yet and have to reduce their effort at the other end. There are also water bodies where management is already done in a way that achieves 40% silver eel escapement in that area.

It represents a very different approach from other NGOs in Holland, and will try to help the European industry to understand the need to move to a Standard demonstrating sustainability, and to support restocking and free fish migration.

The report will be available soon, and will be circulated by DUPAN Alex

Andrew noted that there was room for more EMFF funded conservation projects – particularly in Denmark, Sweden and Ireland to complement the project England and the emerging projects in the Veneto Region of Italy and the Rhone in southern France.

# 5. The Eel and Ireland - a call for SEG Approach: Dr William O’Connor:

William gave an overview of the River Shannon district, and hydro electric management of the estuary. He demonstrated issues including the ongoing use of old, poorly located and unmaintained eel traps.

He told how, as part of his phd research, he had conducted the largest study of eel recruitment ever undertaken in Ireland, with over 20m juvenile eels captured and restocked. Annual catches in late 90s were bigger than early 80s, but the study was not included in Ireland’s Eel Management Plan (EMP).

Having looked at the latest details of silver eel escapement, and latest flow chart of the mitigation plan, he believed that questions should be raised about the efficacy of ongoing monitoring and measurement by IFI and ESB.

He believes that eel passes that have been installed are badly designed, with no investment in old passes that he had built 20 years ago. He stated that there has to be reduction on hydro power mortality, but is meeting with a lot of political resistance. ESB has been calculating on about 20% mortality and much higher % are used elsewhere in Europe (see Brian Knights figures in section 7). He feels there is a policy of endless research and no action. His initial work to raise awareness and build a sustainable agenda in Ireland has received strong interest from anglers and conservationists.

The River Shannon is one of best studied in Europe, and there is growing awareness that current EMP is not working. There is growing pressure for an action plan along lines of SEG. The presentation raised a lot of interest and discussion among the SEG Board.

MG suggested Ireland’s EMP was correct but implementation was poor – WO’C agreed.

BK asked what success existing yellow and silver eel trap and transport schemes were achieving – about 35 tonnes. Fishermen being paid to do it with fyke nets by ESB. Some silver eel fishermen doing it.

PN asked what chance there was that penalties on hydro stations for non compliance with the EMP could be used for investment in restocking? WO’C replied there was no legislation or precedent for it.

RF and ML noted that the difficulties of getting power companies to take positive action for eel recovery is similar in Sweden – difficult solutions were identified for many different and individual problems.

Andy Don shared some of the solutions used in UK, and suggested that further funding and tight legislation would assist the situation.

AK suggested that holding an Eel Conference in Ireland would raise awareness, bring together stakeholders and start the process of creating a sustainable agenda.

Andrew requested Board support for providing SEG support to facilitate a conference in Ireland – and approval was given.

Andrew is building a coalition of interested parties, including IFM heads in UK and Ireland, and will develop plans with William. Andrew & William

BK suggested other speakers be sought to raise wider issues for all migratory fish – and asked if the conference should focus just on eel or broader?

WO’C identified that the issue is primarily focused on the eel - that nothing is being done to benefit from latest recruitment increase.

# 6. Commercial update:

Alex reported on difficult market conditions in Holland and continued pressure from extreme greens.

He also outlined the process undertaken by DUPAN to manage two restocking tenders for glass eel and juvenile eel tenders for the Dutch authorities. DUPAN had taken legal advice on the tender procedure, specifically the current situation when there is a single source situation of supply of glass eels that meet the SEG Standard. Lawyers had explained to DUPAN that EU tender procedures do not allow any differentiation in such circumstances. This very disappointing situation has led to strong and divergent opinions within SEG. As a result a dispute procedure has been written and the Terms of Reference for an enquiry have been prepared. It is anticipated that with the IFM help an investigation into the management of restocking contracts across Europe will be undertaken. In this way lessons can be learnt and recommendation made in support of the sustainable solution

The Board discussed ways to learn from the situation and to avoid legal challenges in future, while also examining whether it would be possible to create a situation where sustainable eel could be specified for restocking contracts in future.

Chris Leftwich explained that until a big case is challenged at Appeal at the European Court, there will be no definitive answer and the process will be open to interpretation. It was suggested that SEG speak to European Parliament representatives re amendments to the tender process to allow for quality assessment to be included in procurement.

There was also a suggestion that an appeals committee and procedure be created for potential future issues on tenders between SEG members.

Andrew agreed to create a paragraph for dispute procedure in future. Andrew

The Board agreed that much had been achieved by a unified SEG, and that all efforts should be made to protect unity in future.

# 7. Conservation & Science:

Matt Gollock reported that IUCN had submitted the majority of its assessments and was waiting for any revisions. New assessments are scheduled to be published in June, but there are many to be completed.

A consortium of eel stakeholders are trying to set up a forum in Japan in July – mirroring the SEG format.

Brian Knights outlined recent research published in Fisheries Management and Ecology relating to mortality of silver eels downstream through pumping stations, and showing over 90% mortality in turbines and 17/19% mortality with Archimedes screws. Contrast this figure with the ESB’s 20% for its turbines on the Shannon.

He also summarised research by Adam Piper into escapement route choice: using the example of the complex river Stour with various weirs and intakes. Using tagged fish, it showed that abstraction losses could be higher when there as an increase in abstraction rates.

Brian concluded with the request that SEG keep up the pressure on organisations to meet their screening obligations, in order to meet eel escapement targets, but must also emphasise the damage caused to other species as well as eels. The message should shift to highlight the need for better connectivity, and not just migration.

Andrew posed the question “How do we make migratory pathways a European crusade?” It was noted that the danger of water pumps and hydropower turbine is not included in extreme green literature.

Andrew agreed to discuss the potential for further progress via Wetlands International at their Board.

Andrew

# 8. Report from Germany:

SEG had commissioned an initial report on the German market by consultant Alexander Wever.

The German market used to be bigger than the Dutch market. Not all of the supermarket chains are wholly opposed to stocking sustainable eel, and there are potential consumers in Germany who are not being supplied.

SEG is trying to build agenda again in Germany, and RF and ML have offered help. There are no active SEG commercial members in Germany – as market conditions are not good.

Germany may be close to 40% escapement target achieved largely through restocking.

Alex suggested a meeting with Mr Wever and SEG at the European fish fair in May.

# 9. Communications:

Simon Soffe gave a summary of recent PR and communications projects, including the presentation to London chefs, and the substantial media coverage of the enormous elver runs on the Parrett and Severn, and subsequent SEG restocking initiatives. Plans for SEG’s project to release elvers into the Thames with Zac Goldsmith MP for World Fish Migration Day were also outlined.

The DUPAN foundation wanted it noted that they had been excluded from World Fish Migration day at the insistence of Dutch NGO's, such as WWF-NL.

Alex asked how the media would react, and how SEG should position itself, if recruitment is lower next year. The Board discussed the options concluding that the Standard was the only shield for such an eventuality. Simon agreed to include such a scenario in future communications plans.

Steven Mowat gave details of the work ZSL is doing IUCN, EA and IFM at the Zoo for World Fish Migration Day.