

## Germany is transit country for one of planet's greatest Wildlife Crime

For the first time, wildlife smugglers were caught at a German airport trying to illegally transport live European eel juveniles, so-called glass eels, to Asia. According to German customs, approximately 2,000 fish, packed in plastic bags filled with water and oxygen, were confiscated on Wednesday, November 28 at Frankfurt Airport<sup>1</sup>.

Since 2010 the trade of European eels beyond the European external border is prohibited<sup>2</sup>. The reason for this is a sharp decline in stocks.

*"Unfortunately, the incident is not a surprise and it was only a matter of time before eel smugglers were caught in Germany", says Florian Stein, eel trade expert of the European NGO Sustainable Eel Group (SEG). "During the last glass eel fishing season almost six tonnes, equivalent to about 18 million glass eels, were confiscated in Europe, mainly at European airports and during targeted police operations. According to Spanish police information, at least 720,000 of these glass eels were to be transported in suitcases from Portugal and Spain via Frankfurt and Munich to Asia. The number of unreported cases is presumably much higher."*

On the black market, similarly high prices can be achieved with this wildlife smuggling as with drug or weapons smuggling. On average, the price for a kilogram of smuggled glass eels is around 1500 €<sup>3</sup>. In January 2018, up to 6,000 € are said to have been paid for a kilogram of living European glass eels due to a particularly high demand in Asia.

Due to their complex life cycle, eels cannot yet be reproduced in captivity. This is why aquaculture depends on glass eels caught in the wild, which are then fattened in aquaculture until they are ready for the market. Demand from China is particularly high. Chinese eel farms account for about 85% of global eel consumption<sup>4</sup>. One kilogram of glass eel contains approximately 3,000 individuals from which, depending on survival rate and market weight, processed filets (*Kabayaki* style) with a market value of up to € 30,000 can be produced<sup>5</sup>.

Europol estimates that about 100 tons of live glass eels are illegally exported to Asia every year<sup>6</sup>. The annual demand for European aquaculture and stocking, on the other hand, is only around 30 tonnes<sup>7</sup>.

*"If Europol is right, about a quarter of the stock is illegally exported to Asia every year. This must have a negative effect on the stock which will be obvious to everyone! At the same time trafficking undermines the enormous efforts towards stock recovery we are making in Europe" adds Florian Stein. "Consequently, stock recovery can only be achieved if the fight against illegal trade is implemented even more effectively by the European Member States, as agreed by the Fisheries Ministers in a Joint Declaration<sup>8</sup> at the end of 2017."*

### **Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.zoll.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/Artenschutz/2018/z76\\_glasaalen.html](http://www.zoll.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/Artenschutz/2018/z76_glasaalen.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/49ab3fc9-646b-4b35-ac42-f0333479ce24/54\\_summary\\_srg.pdf](https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/49ab3fc9-646b-4b35-ac42-f0333479ce24/54_summary_srg.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardiacivil.es/en/prensa/noticias/6121.html>

<sup>4</sup> [www.fao.org/fishery/statistics/software/fishstatj/en](http://www.fao.org/fishery/statistics/software/fishstatj/en)

<sup>5</sup> (2018) unpublished estimates, Sustainable Eel Group (SEG)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/glass-eel-traffickers-earned-more-eur-37-million-illegal-exports-to-asia>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SEG-Report-2018-1-V2.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15687-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

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