Eel, the eurofish

historical management challenges the future

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Preview of my talk

a. Sketch the history of the eel fisheries
b. Trends in stock and fisheries
c. Management: a long-lasting tragedy
d. Breaking this historical dead-lock
e. Success – strengthen the key-factors!
f. Show nice pictures, tell fine stories.
Subsistence fisheries: Valencia

Madoz 1845

Sanez-Reguart 1791: No glass eel!

1950: 5 tons glass eel, now 0.1 t

Madox (1845), Clavero & Hermoso (2015)
Subsistence fisheries everywhere
Fat, Food and Fables
50 – 500 kg per fisher per year. A million fishers?

Surbeck (1902):

Sörfors ålhus 1/2 ta ål
Torringe ålhus 1/2 L11 smör
Värsta ålhus
Stöde sn
Grössjöbäckens ålhus 1/2 L11 smör
Böle ålhus 1/2 ” ”
Viskans ålhus (Wislands) 1/2 ” ”

Das Fett, das sich beim Sieden eines Aals auf der Oberfläche des Wassers ansammelt, wurde zur Heilung von Wunden gebraucht und soll, auf den Kopf geschmiert, „die kalkköpff mit Haar bezieren“
1893 New markets, new products

0.5 – 5 ton per fisher per year. Ten-thousands of fishers (?), 20,000 tons, 80% smoked

Doose (1908): "The eel, a cheap folk food in the past, has generally become a table fish, and smoked, it is a delicacy, which can only be obtained for expensive money"
1900-1940 Stimulating commercial expansion

Lindemann 1881:

Soon, the eel fisheries will have to be restricted, if we want to avoid fishing out.
Early, slow decline

“EU market” = 80% smoked
Glass eel exploitation

Briand et al, 2008
Horse cart, automobile & airplane

- 1900
- Subsistence fisheries

1900 -
- Commercial fisheries

~ 1980 ~
- Aquaculture

When?
- Artificial reproduction

~ 1980 ~
- Recreational, Poaching

Current market
- Cultural heritage

“Invest in future”
- “Coming soon”
Management of the stock

Until Eel Regulation:
European Economic Area: sharing knowledge, one market
Splendid isolation: all for themselves - Omnes pro ipsis
Fisheries adapting to growing non-fishing impacts, overfishing

Since Eel Regulation:
Collective action, coordinated
Orchestration, feedback
- Scientific advice, no ivory tower
- Long-term targets → short-term limits
  40 % biomass → 40+ % survival
- Address non-fishing impacts more

1854 Anonymous
1879 Millet
1933 Röhler
1967 Meyer-Waarden
2003 Dekker et al.
2011 – a turning point?

Expectations: 2011 earliest & speed down ≈ up

The most optimistic expectations came true. *With all vinegarish reservations one can make, of course.*

Can we stop protecting? No, it is time to press-on.
Eel, the eurofish

Eel is a luxury product – fishery on a stock in decline. Overwhelming non-fishing impacts, high economic interests. 150 years of fragmented management, all over Europe.

The Eel Regulation established unity in our diversity. European coordination (not patronage) is key to success. Success, press-on, do not risk losing the gains.

Alarm about eel has been noticed. 150-year dead-lock broken, all over Europe. “Slipping through our hands” – not anymore!