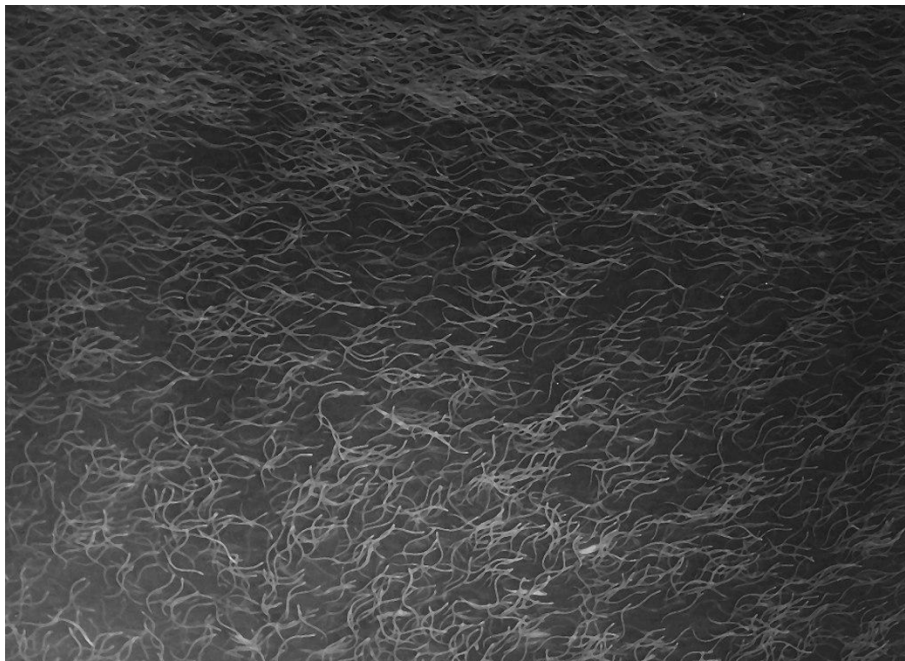


## THE EUROPEAN EEL REGULATION: EFFECTIVE, ELEMENTS TO BE SHARPENED, FURTHER AMBITION AND ACTION NEEDED

Brussels, 19 February 2020

On 18 February 2020, the European Commission published its evaluation of the Eel Regulation, the EU-wide protection policy for the European eel. SEG welcomes the outcome of this evaluation, and the identified need for more ambition – further action is needed.



*Young eel, in front of the Dutch coast – this photograph was taken in April 1958. Until 1980, abundances like this were the normal situation. Since, the recruitment of young eel gradually declined, to just one percent of this.*

### Background

The European eel stock (*Anguilla anguilla*) is in critical condition, all over Europe. Recruitment is low and management and exploitation of the stock are currently unsustainable. The decline in the eel stock has numerous causes including human activities such as fisheries (commercial and recreational), hydropower turbines and pumps, pollution, habitat modification or loss, and the creation of obstacles to eel migration. A further deterioration of the status of the stock should be avoided. In 2007 a framework to ensure the protection and sustainable use of the European eel stock was established at EU level (Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 – the so called ‘Eel Regulation’). Now, a decade after its implementation, the EU-Commission has published an extensive evaluation of this Regulation ([https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/european-eel-recovery-where-are-we-after-decade\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/european-eel-recovery-where-are-we-after-decade_en)).

### Summarising the evaluation

Following an external evaluation study (not published yet) and a broad stakeholder consultation, the Commission reports on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence,

EU added-value, and sustainability of this policy, with an aim to help to determine whether the Eel Regulation needs to be reviewed and/or whether its implementation needs to be improved and/or other actions are needed. In its conclusion, the Commission notes that the Eel Regulation has been an important milestone, and remains as relevant as it was in 2009. Despite notable progress in reducing fishing effort, further ambition is needed on non-fisheries related measures.

### **SEG's opinion about the evaluation**

The Sustainable Eel Group SEG is positive about the thoroughness of this evaluation and can identify with the conclusions. This includes conclusions on the effectiveness of the Regulation as such, on the need for an EU-wide traceability system, and on the need for an improved integration between the Eel Regulation and other policies (WFD, Natura 2000, CITES, CMS, etc.). This evaluation is based on information and documents as available in early 2019, and reaches a bottom line that the stock is still in dire straits. Later in 2019, however, it has become clear that a more optimistic view is warranted, as it is now certain that recruitment has started to increase since 2011 (Article in [The Ecologist](#), and the graph on [SEG's website](#)).

### **SEG's view on the Eel Regulation**

In its evaluation, the European Commission highlights a number of short-comings and future focus-points of the current Eel protection policies. Obviously, this is a good first step towards developing a more concrete plan of action, in the period coming. However, SEG considers that an evaluation of the governance process itself would have been warranted too, which would have identified EU-wide coordination and international evaluation of national action as of key importance to the success of collective action ([Dekker 2016](#)). As suggested before ([SEG's response to the Consultation](#)), a more structural strengthening of the coordinative and evaluative role of the EU-Commission is urgently needed (e.g. NASCO-like or eel-specific RAC).

Before 2007 - before the Eel Regulation was adopted - the eel stock was in very critical condition: historically low abundance, and not really anyone bothering about that. The adoption of the Eel Regulation has changed that: increased awareness, the development of national management plans, wide-spread protective actions, in a comprehensive approach. As the Commission notes, the focus on non-fishing impacts can be improved. Though the stock is still only a fraction of what it has been before, the collective action all over Europe, as orchestrated by the Eel Regulation, has created a success. The subsequent upward turn - after a multi-decadal downward trend - in glass eel recruitment, indicates that protection policies can make a difference. Complex problems – as the eel is - can be reversed, even if they involve all of Europe. At the end of this day, however, we disagree with the bottom-line conclusion in the Commission report that “the status of the eel remains critical”. This seemingly pessimistic conclusion essentially mixes the long-term Objective (recovery to 40% of the pristine biomass) that cannot be achieved in our lifetime (for biological reasons), with the current-day's Means to achieve it: adequate protection (for which more can be done by Member States), under good international governance as achieved by the Eel Regulation. Hence, there is all reason to improve the implementation of the Eel Regulation, all over Europe. For that, further ambition and concrete action will be required. If we achieve that, the stock will not restore to historical levels overnight, but there will be good hope that the upward trend in recruitment will continue, for as long as it takes to reach full recovery of the stock.