

## The young eels, that immigrated our rivers this spring, deserve sustainable protection within their lifetime!



(Mother Eel, by Maready Evergreen)

On Nov-04 2021, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea ICES has published its [2021 advice](#) for the fishing opportunities in 2022 on European eel throughout its distribution area. Essentially, the advice now says to stop all fishing on eel, and to end restocking (moving young eel from areas of high abundance to areas of low abundance). This is a major step up in the wording, compared to the previous 20 years of advice (to minimise fishing, to allow restocking only under strict conditions).

### SEG is very surprised and alarmed with this advice, for a number of reasons:

- First, ICES gives no reason or justification for the change. Has the situation deteriorated? Are the current protection measures ineffective?
- Second, ICES does not address the EU-wide protection programme, in place since 2007. In 2002, ICES advised to compile that protection programme, and even proposed concrete targets for such a plan. Is ICES abandoning its own advice?
- Thirdly, ICES focuses attention on closing the fisheries throughout Europe. Has ICES evaluated the effect of such a closure? Will it make a difference when all non-fishing impacts remain? What about the impact of such a change on poaching and trafficking?
- Fourthly, As there is already a European protection programme in place that sets concrete targets, what will be gained from a blanket call for action, with unspecified targets?

**SEG is very happy that – following the adoption and implementation of the European Eel Regulation in 2007 – the decline in the young eel immigration halted after 2011 (and now is bouncing up and down irregularly).**

However, SEG realises that the implementation of this plan needs to be progressed (initial fishing restrictions have been taken, but non-fishing impacts largely still have to be addressed). Let's not make the mistake to solve the current implementation stand-still, by un-doing the successful first step (i.e. undermining the Eel Regulation) – that would create a set-back of decades. Let's continue the move forward and fully implement the protection as agreed in the EU Eel Regulation and so fulfil our promise to the eel for a sustainable protection across its distribution area.

**SEG thus calls for:**

- Evaluating achieved protection levels (2021 estimates provide the basis for that),
- Improving the implementation of the Eel Regulation structurally within five years, and
- Reaching the agreed minimal protection within this decade (before 2030).

For a more constructive analysis of the current situation, see our [position](#) on protection and recovery.