

Purpose and background

This statement on the regulation of the UK Glass Eel fisheries was prepared to document the development of the glass eel fishery since the UK left the European Union on 1 February 2020 ('Brexit'). The statement was drafted by the Sustainable Eel Group with input from the UK Environment Agency.

Statement

In the four countries of United Kingdom the Glass eel fisheries are regulated as follows:

Scotland

There was no fishery before Brexit and there has been no change since.

Northern Ireland

There is currently no glass eel fishery. Glass eel fishing was stopped as a policy measure in 2009 as part of the country's Eel Management Plan in response to the 2007 EU Eel Regulation.

There has been no change since Brexit.

Import of Glass eels from England for restocking into Lough Neagh from England has continued, albeit at reducing levels each year. The practice was permitted under CITES rules by developing a new Non Detriment Finding (NDF) assessment. Note, that under the Brexit agreement, there was a separate protocol for Northern Ireland, which, for trading purposes, was to be considered as still part of the EU. Hence, a NDF assessment was required to trade glass eels from England to Northern Ireland.

Wales

Prior to Brexit there were several small licenced hand-net fisheries on rivers in Wales. Following Brexit, and partly in response to ICES WGEEL's advice to stop all fishing, in November 2020 the Welsh Government and Agency (Natural Resources Wales) took the decision to issue no more licences from 2021.

There has been no change since.

England

Prior to Brexit there was a healthy glass eel market, with exports averaging 4.75 tonnes per year during 2010 - 2019. Since the inception of the EU Eel Regulation, glass eel fishing was permitted for hand-net fishing for circa 300 fishers on about 10 rivers on the west coast of England. 90% of the catch came from the rivers Severn and Parrett.

With no consumption, processing or aquaculture markets in UK, this annual trade of 4.75 tonnes was almost all exported out of England to markets in the EU: to Northern Ireland and on the continent. Approximately 70% was sent for restocking.

At Brexit, trade of glass eels from the UK to the EU was effectively stopped, as the EU did not accept the NDF developed by the UK Government. Consequently, with reduced demand for glass eels there has been reduced fishing and reduced demand for fishing licences.

The only trade since has been, to work within the new trading arrangements:

- 1) Within UK (to Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland)
- 2) To Russia

Glass eel trade to Morocco, and other non-EU range states is theoretically possible, but the only trade that has taken place outside of UK so far has been to Russia.

No other CITES export permits have been issued. So, at present, a fishery is permitted on two rivers, the Severn and Parrett, but fewer glass eel fishing licences are issued due to reduced market demand.

Summary for UK

Since Brexit, the demand for glass eels from the UK has significantly reduced due to the impact of CITES restrictions. Trade of eels between the UK and the EU has ceased. The recent listing of European eel on the EU suspensions regulations (i.e. banning imports into the EU) further reduces the possibility of future UK-EU trade in glass eel.

Glass eel fishing is permitted on only two rivers by the English Environment Agency: the Severn and the Parrett with the issuance of hand-net licences. The number of licences issued is much reduced, due to reduced demand: circa 150 in 2022, compared to circa 300 pre-Brexit.

David Bunt
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