

Refutation

On Wednesday 2024-Dec-04, Remy Käller and Max Wastiaux published an article on the EU-website of Follow the Money¹, in which they questioned the influence of the Sustainable Eel Group (SEG) on EU policies to protect the European Eel, and questioned the influence of the commercial sector on SEG in turn. In their view, SEG's influence has led to EU restrictions on fisheries being lifted, thereby hanging the future of eel protection on the hook. We contribute to a dialogue by analysing their main arguments, and responding to those, here below. Each bullet point begins with their argument (in italics), but note that we summarised those in our own words.

1. *SEG is financed by the commercial sector.* Firstly, SEG is open and transparent about its funding and governance with information published on our website. We are partly funded by Eel Stewardship Funds, which are a levy on sales to fund eel conservation projects. Secondly, although the authors do not say so, they probably intend to imply that SEG – being financed by the commercial sector - predominantly serves the interests of their financiers, not the protection of the eel. We refer the reader to SEG's most recent publication: the [SEG Recommendations 2024 on the protection of the European eel](#) where the first Recommendation reads: "1. Comprehensive policy: (...) Develop a comprehensive policy for all human impacts – not just fisheries. Hence: Eel Regulation is prime, not CFP." And only Recommendation 11 then reads "11. Fishing versus other impacts: Prioritise reducing non-fishing impacts. Fishing impacts have been reduced substantially in the past years; non-fisheries impacts have hardly been reduced". Is that a prejudiced commercial advantaging – as FtM accuses SEG of - or an attempt to re-balance the ongoing discussions disproportionally focusing on fishing restrictions, while fishing reductions alone will not suffice to restore the eel stock? Instead of blaming the sector for funding SEG and blaming SEG for influencing the EU, isn't the sector to be credited for their stewardship-role in the discussions about eel, for their wider-looking contribution to the development of sustainable management for the eel?
2. *SEG has a decisive influence on the EU (both EU-Commission and EU-Parliament).* First of all, SEG has no authority, no responsibility for EU policies – that is the prerogative of the EU-institutions themselves (Council, Commission and Parliament). Hence, SEG informs and influences those three institutions - like Follow-the-Money and so many other green NGO's do. So what is the problem: that SEG is successful? That our arguments were understood and supported by those institutions? Secondly, SEG's aims to enhance and accelerate the protection of the European eel, by contributing to the implementation of the Eel Regulation. To this end, SEG is influencing parties inside and outside the EU-institutions – and that influencing is always done transparently, and focused on the argument. Now, what is the problem: do the authors have no further credible counter-arguments, and try instead to embarrass SEG for its financing sources, without substantial argument about eel?
3. *SEG does not follow the latest scientific advice by ICES, to zero all catches and reduce all non-fishing human impacts to zero.* Here, the authors are absolutely right: SEG does not buy that advice, because



¹ Käller R. and Wastiaux M. 2024 Caught in the net / How EU policies on endangered eel follow industry, not scientific, advice. Published on <https://www.ftm.eu/articles/how-industry-lobbyists-influence-eu-rules-eel>.

“it is unrealistic to suggest that fisheries and other human impacts can be zeroed” (SEG Recommendations 2024, again). It will be hard to zero all fishing, because – without the involvement of fishers and fishery inspectors - poaching (and trafficking) will quickly take over. And probably more important than that, there is no political support to zero all non-fishing impacts. Is there anybody aiming to remove all water management, to stop all hydro-power generation, to drown all reclaimed land, and more? Rather than this unrealistic daydreaming, ICES would have done better to specify a minimal limit on protective measures, beyond which the eel will not recover – leaving it to the policy makers to decide whether to respect this limit (the Eel Regulation 2007 decided to do so!), and by what means (the Eel Regulation delegated this choice of means predominantly to the national Eel Management Plans).

Moreover, the [2024 ICES advice](#) is not in line with the [2002 ICES advice](#) that led to the development of the [Eel Regulation](#), and ICES never gave any argument to justify a change in their advice. Additionally, the current advice is not in line with the Precautionary Approach and the corresponding FAO Guidelines (although ICES claims it is, they do not respond when being challenged on that²). So indeed, SEG does not follow the latest scientific advice from ICES – because that advice itself is questionable and unrealistic.

At the bottom line, the article on the website of Follow-the-Money discusses the authors’ view on SEG - commercially financed, quite influential, and not subscribing to the latest scientific advice. SEG agrees with all three points: we praise the sector for their stewardship role and wider involvement; we are happy that responsible authorities were receptive to our arguments; and we regret that ICES has effectively replaced its 2002 constructive advice, by a questionable and unrealistic opinion now. But is their prejudiced view on SEG the only thing they want to discuss, in the context of the protection policies for the European eel?

Contact

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² Dekker ([2016](#), [2019](#) in appendix 10), WGEEL ([2019](#), chapter 5), and SEG ([2021](#)).

³ Alciato A. 1591 *Emblemata*, Leyden, Officina Plantiniana. The Latin text of this emblem translates: If anyone hunting eels sweeps clear rivers or thinks to visit unmuddied lakes, he will be unsuccessful and waste his efforts. If he instead stirs up much clay and with his oar churns the crystal waters, he will be rich. Likewise, a state in turmoil becomes a source of profit to people who in peace go hungry, because the law cramps their style.