

Measures for recovery of European eel

- a critically endangered species





The Fisheries Secretariat

- An NGO secretariat based in Stockholm
- Established in 2003 by 3 Swedish NGOs
- Working with fisheries policy from environmental perspective in the Baltic region, in the EU and beyond.
- Collaboration and capacity building
- Long history of engagement with European eel



European eel - one widespread population

- Listed as **critically endangered** on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List since 2008.
- Multiple causes are believed to be behind the decline.
- Since 2021, ICES advice is **zero catch of all life stages in all habitats**, including eels used for restocking and aquaculture.
- In 2022, advice was strengthened to bringing **all non-fisheries related anthropogenic mortalities to zero**, and that **quantity and quality of eel habitats should be restored**, including connectivity as well as physical, chemical and biological properties.



EU management and regional commitments

- EU regulation 1100/2007 set out measures for recovery
- CFP key objectives: precautionary approach & MSY – “likely... well below potential biological limit reference points” – and on EU Red List
- EU agreed to further measures in 2017, and extended eel fishing closure to 6 months in December 2022 + EU-wide ban on recreational fishing for eel in marine waters
- Further measures set out in the Marine Action Plan, including revision of national EMPs
- Regional commitments under HELCOM, OSPAR and GFCM/Barcelona
- Global efforts under CITES and CMS



Effectiveness of EU management

“The objective of each Eel Management Plan shall be to reduce anthropogenic mortalities ...to permit ...the escapement to the sea of at least 40 % of the silver eel biomass relative to the best estimate of escapement that would have existed if no anthropogenic influences had impacted the stock.” To be achieved in the long term.

Eel Management Units [preferably] based on river basins and coordinated with efforts under the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive

- An Eel Management Plan may contain, but is not limited to, the following measures... Implementation of the eel regulation quite flexible and open to interpretation.
- Approach very variable and effort across Member States difficult to compare.
- Regular evaluations of implementation: every 3 years, then every 6 years.
- Evaluation in 2022 showed no overall progress on achieving the biomass escapement target and measures addressing other potential threats still lagging behind.
- Evaluation in 2025 (just released): incomplete reporting, inconsistencies. No evidence total escapement is increasing + anthropogenic mortality remains high. Measures not in line with scientific advice - overall fishing mortality reduced but in almost 25% of EMUs fishing remains substantial. **Recruitment so low that objective is not achievable?**



Possibilities and limitations of EU regulation

- Flexibility also means “sky is the limit”
- Premise of river basin focus (WFD): coherence & effectiveness
- Ambitious objective – but vague/hard to define
- Not aligned with the CFP or Lisbon Treaty
- No clear time table – but obligation to set one
- No guidance that makes measures/indicators comparable
- Relatively strong focus on restocking as measure
- No regional coherence, aside from the Mediterranean
- Very few EMPs in line with scientific advice!



FishSec recommendations

1. Follow the scientific advice – no fishing for any life stage in any waters
2. No recreational fishing for eel anywhere
3. Implement further measures to improve habitats and water quality
4. Greater integration nationally with the WFD
5. Control, enforcement and traceability to limit IUU and illegal trade
6. Regionally coordinated eel fishing closures to protect eel migration
7. If the measure is used, no restocking above migration barriers
8. Move towards fishery independent monitoring
9. Greater understanding of natural recruitment and the role of eels in the ecosystem needed



Thanks for listening!

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