

i Executive summary

The purpose of the WKFEA was to discuss the current ICES advice¹ framework, consider options for future assessment and advice needs and draft a roadmap towards recommendations for a new or adapted advice framework for fishing opportunities and potentially other anthropogenic pressures on European eel.

The current Advice given on eel was considered to be in accordance with the precautionary approach as applied by ICES. However, there is room for improvement in the clarity of the current Advice given to make it relative to fishing opportunity, whilst considering the other anthropogenic impacts in another section of the advice sheet. While there is a need to define reference points to inform managers of the state of the stock and with respect to recovery, the current Advice given was considered to use the best available quality assessed knowledge. Whether the ICES advice supports management decisions sufficiently is difficult to assess since the two are set at different spatial scales.

Options for improving the evidence base and adapting the advice were considered. Whether the advice is given for the whole stock, over its entire distribution area was not questioned. However, given the spatial heterogeneity in the stock and fisheries distribution, a spatialised stock assessment model seems necessary to estimate trends in mortality at the population scale. A table of specific issues relative to general concepts (biological parameters, biological reference points, assessment methods, fisheries and ecosystem issues) was drawn up, and challenges, together with potential solutions, were described.

To scope the need for advice and the associated concepts with the requesters and end-users, an online survey was developed and distributed amongst the requesters and end-users to evaluate their level of awareness on the recurrent ICES advice, its role and contents, and to understand their needs, in order improve either the content or formulation of the advice. Some of the answers are eel-specific and mostly relate to the ambiguity of the current advice, which mixes fisheries opportunities and conservation needs. Others are more general and could apply to most of the ICES advice products and raised concerns on the form and/or language that they may not be so easily understood. A need for a better communication strategy to/between all players was also mentioned.

Finally, the future of eel assessment and advice was addressed through a roadmap that targets two major improvements: 1) to improve the data that should be part of a stock analysis, and 2) to provide more holistic advice by taking the whole ecosystem into greater account and looking in more detail at the impacts of the different types of pressures affecting the eel population.

¹ Note that throughout the text Advice, with a capital letter refers to the headline of the advice sheet, i.e. the section currently called 'ICES advice on fishing opportunities' whereas advice with lower case refers to the full text given by ICES for each stock