

FUTURE FOR EUROPEAN EEL STOCK AND THOSE DEPENDING ON IT

INFORMATION NOTE

The stock of European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is severely depleted, its population has fallen by 90% since the 1960s/70s and it remains in a critical state.

The latest ICES advice on European eel of November 2021¹ advises zero catches for all life stages and in all habitats, and recommends to minimise and eliminate where possible all other anthropogenic mortality factors. This advice, alongside the ICES advice of May 2022 on the implementation of Member States' national eel management plans², confirms that despite EU and its Member States' efforts, no overall progress has been achieved to allow at least 40% of adult eels escape to the open sea as required under the 'Eel Regulation'³. Although the sharp decline of eel stock has been stopped, there are no signs of eel recovery.

The European eel is a long-lived migratory species that has a complex biology and life cycle. There are various pressures on eels, namely fishing, including for consumption, leisure, restocking and farming purposes; obstacles in rivers and lakes such as hydropower dams and pumping stations; predation; habitat loss and degradation; pollution and contaminants. Climate change also has an impact. Illegal fishing and illegal trade from the EU remain a problem as well. Hence, it is clear that, while more stringent fisheries management measures are required, managing fisheries alone is not enough to overturn the situation. Measures should therefore be considered within the wider context of activities impacting the eel stock and taking into consideration fisheries and farming, the environmental and the socio-economic aspects. For eel to thrive there is a need to look also at issues such as river continuity, health of the waters, and nature restoration, as called for by the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030.

In light of this situation, it is essential that Member States pursue with determination the adoption, revision where necessary and implementation of their eel management plans under the 'Eel Regulation', including reinforced fisheries control and measures to combat the smuggling of glass eel. It is also of great importance that Member States continue their efforts for a full implementation of the Water Framework Directive⁴ and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive⁵. In addition, it is crucial that the Council aims for a high level of ambition when adopting measures for marine fisheries in the annual Fishing Opportunities Regulations as the current 3-month fishing closure at EU level is insufficient to address the challenges. The efforts should focus on those measures that by definition have a high probability of reducing mortality and increasing escapement.

¹ [ICES advice on European eel](#), issued 4 November 2021

² [ICES advice](#) on technical evaluation of the Eel Management Plan progress reports

³ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1100/2007 of 18 September 2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel](#), OJ L 248, 22.9.2007, p. 17–23

⁴ [Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy](#), OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1–73

⁵ [Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy](#), OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19–40

In the same vein, the situation calls for continued investments and dialogue at the international and regional level. Concerning the Mediterranean and Black Sea, at the level of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) a lot of work has been done since the adoption of a multiannual management plan for European eel in 2018 and, the Commission will count on the Council's unequivocal support in pushing for ambitious measures, based on the GFCM research programme, to be adopted at the GFCM annual meeting later this autumn. For the Baltic, the Commission will count on continued efforts under the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission, HELCOM) for the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Undoubtedly, the challenges require ambition and close collaboration between the different administrations, stakeholders and Member States. There is a need for a holistic approach taking into account the socio-economic impacts and the Commission therefore calls on all Member States to ensure close cooperation in all other relevant departments, for example by ensuring coherence between the eel management plans under the 'Eel Regulation' and the river basin management plans under the Water Framework Directive, as well as to further explore the interlinkages with the Programmes of Measures under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Given the huge demand for renewable energy, this aspect also needs to be carefully looked at in relation to the impacts of hydropower plants and pumping stations on the fish stocks migrating between the rivers and seas, and looking at the technical solutions for protecting migrating eels and mitigating injury and mortality.

The recovery of European eel and ensuring the future sustainable economic activities need our full attention and commitment. In this regard, the Commission consulted the Member States and the Advisory Councils on how to best implement ICES' zero catch advice and analysed the replies received. The Fisheries Directors General of the Member States have recently exchanged on this important topic during an informal meeting hosted by the Czech Presidency. Currently, **the Commission is considering the most suitable measures to address these complex challenges, taking into account fisheries and farming, the environmental and the socio-economic aspects.** It is clear that **the status quo is not an option.**

The Commission therefore invites **all Member States to express their views about the most effective and efficient measures in reducing eel mortalities caused by all anthropogenic pressures and improving eel escapement to the open sea** to help rebuilding the stock for the benefits of the people, the economy and nature. The European Green Deal gives an impetus for preserving and restoring the biodiversity, ensuing sustainability of economic sectors and a just transition - in turn it will help rebuilding the eel stock and the fisheries and aquaculture depending on it.