

## Annex II: Prohibition of European Eel

COM (2017) 461

27 September 2017

### European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) Critically Endangered

**The Fisheries Secretariat and Seas At Risk support the Commission proposal to prohibit all marine eel fisheries in the EU waters of the Baltic Sea for 2018<sup>1</sup>.**

The Commission proposal notes that eel catches in the Baltic are the highest reported in the EU. The fishery targets mature adult and migrating eels a proportion of which are females, which are hugely important for the recovery of the stock. ICES<sup>2</sup> advice has been clear and consistent for a decade. The stock status remains critical. All anthropogenic mortalities including fisheries should be reduced to zero, or kept as close to zero as possible.

The European eel is listed as critically endangered in CITES<sup>3</sup> Appendix II (2009), the IUCN<sup>4</sup> list of endangered species (2008), the HELCOM<sup>5</sup> Red list (2013) and Annex II of CMS<sup>6</sup> (2014).

The IUCN listing is made on the basis of the dramatic drop in incoming amounts of glass eels to EU coasts compared to average numbers 1960-1979 and not because there are very few actual eel alive today. The issue is that the recruitment is so seriously impaired that the stock is outside safe biological limits and there are concerns about the stock's ability to recover, even in the long term. It is therefore especially critical that adult 'silver' eel can return to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

The current eel recovery plan (1100/2007<sup>7</sup>) is not in line with the CFP/MSY target and therefore must be set aside. According to ICES the eel population is data limited and TAC should hence be set in

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/com-2017-461\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/com-2017-461_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2017/Special\\_requests/eu.2017.08.pdf](https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2017/Special_requests/eu.2017.08.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://cites.org/eng/news/pr/2009/090313\\_eel.shtml](https://cites.org/eng/news/pr/2009/090313_eel.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/60344/0>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/biodiversity/red-list-of-species/red-list-of-fish-and-lamprey-species/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cms.int/en/species/anguilla-anguilla>

accordance with the precautionary principle. ICES deem TAC to be zero and under the CFP TAC should be set according to scientific advice. Hence, the zero TAC should apply not only to the Baltic but to all European fisheries. If the prohibition measure is to be truly efficient MS should also implement it in fresh water as in many MS inland eel catches exceed marine catches, and they target the same population.

Many eels are killed in hydro power plants, often unnecessarily as there are many good mitigations measures to use. For a truly sustainable management of the population an efficient implementation of the water framework directive, demanding free passage of migratory fish through all river obstacles, must be implemented.

Eels live a long time but spawn only once. The life cycle of the eel cannot yet be completed in captivity. Farmed eels are glass eels from the wild stock that have been fed in captivity until maturity. Eel restocking is practiced all over Europe where glass or elver eels are caught and transported to another habitat, free of migration obstacles. Restocking will only truly be effective if the eels are restocked in habitats with high water-quality and with free seaward migration ways. However, this does not contribute to stock recovery if the migrating adult eels are then caught in The Baltic sea.

There is a substantial problem with the illegal export of glass eel to countries outside of the EU<sup>8</sup>. The legal glass eel trade within the EU provides a screen for that illegal activity<sup>9</sup>. Prohibiting all commercial eel fishery in the EU would very likely expose and reduce the substantial illegal eel trade. Only glass eel fishery for restocking should be allowed.

Mortality on all life stages of eel is problematic and should be reduced to zero, in line with scientific advice. An EU wide prohibition of fisheries including on the glass eel fishery for trade purposes is required. In the meantime starting with the prohibition on eel fishing in the Baltic is a reasonable first step.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007R1100>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/eu-law-enforcement-step-efforts-to-protect-environment-%E2%80%93-48-arrested-for-trafficking-endangered-species>

<sup>9</sup> <http://eurojust.europa.eu/press/PressReleases/Pages/2017/2017-03-08.aspx>