

Thursday 9th December 2021

BSAC 2021-2022/29

## BSAC statement on eel

### Introduction

ICES issued its advice for eel 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021.<sup>1</sup>

ICES has advised zero catches (commercial and recreational) in 2022. All other anthropogenic mortalities should be minimised and eliminated where possible.

Given that the fishery has already made a positive contribution to the protection and recovery of the eel stock through various protection and stocking measures, the total ban on eel fishing in EU waters recommended by ICES is not proportionate and is rejected by the majority of BSAC members. The eel fishery is a centuries-old living cultural heritage.

There is no consensus among the members of the BSAC on the ICES advice of zero catches.

The Commission produced its non-paper with its proposals for eel on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021.<sup>2</sup>

What is presented here are consensus views and advice on other factors that hamper eel recovery and that require immediate and urgent attention and work.

### **The BSAC calls for measures against IUU fishing for eel to be prioritised.**

The illegal fishery and subsequent illegal export of eel to Asia is widespread and totally unacceptable. More and serious efforts should be made to make sure that the law is complied with and that sufficient resources are allocated.

Control and inspection must increase by means of targeted and joint measures engaging the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) in all Member States and elsewhere.

The BSAC welcomes the inclusion of the European eel in the scope of the SCIPs (Specific Control and Inspection Programmes) and the JDPs (Joint Deployment Programmes). The BSAC agrees that this should include control of the eel fisheries closures.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Forms/DispForm.aspx?ID=38321>

<sup>2</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL:ST\\_14730\\_2021\\_INIT&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL:ST_14730_2021_INIT&from=EN)

Other coordinated control measures, which have proven successful in the past, must increase in all Baltic Member States and elsewhere. The use of drones for inspections, for example, is recommended.

The BSAC calls on Member States and EFCA to provide a state of play with respect to control and enforcement.<sup>3</sup>

**The BSAC underlines that the EU ban on all eel exports to countries outside the EU should remain.** This ban has been in force since 2010.<sup>4</sup> This ban needs to be combined with further efforts to control it effectively, including better EU-wide traceability systems. Efforts are still a long way from the desired goal.

**The BSAC draws attention to data needs.**

There is an urgent need for legislation that requires the collection and provision of data. Landing data is needed. There is also a need for a better understanding of the migrations of glass eel and silver eel.

**The BSAC draws attention to other factors** than direct human activities that have an impact on the eel stock.<sup>5</sup>

Man-made non-fishery-related sources of mortality must be dealt with. The ICES advice that other anthropogenic mortalities should be minimized and eliminated where possible needs to be taken seriously in order to reduce the overall mortality of eel. This means addressing hydropower plants and water cooling plants, channel deepening in rivers and pumped storage plants, as well as pollution.

**Migration barriers and efforts to tackle river continuity must be addressed with more urgency.** This measure is still not given enough priority by Member States in their Eel Management Plans.<sup>6</sup> Migration possibilities in rivers, both upstream and downstream, should be ensured as soon as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> This was already raised by the BSAC at its Executive Committee meeting with EFCA on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021: <http://www.bsac.dk/Meetings/BSAC-meetings/Executive-Committee-meeting-with-EFCA>

<sup>4</sup> [https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/49ab3fc9-646b-4b35-ac42-f0333479ce24/54\\_summary\\_srg.pdf](https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/49ab3fc9-646b-4b35-ac42-f0333479ce24/54_summary_srg.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bsac.dk/getattachment/BSAC-Resources/BSAC-Statements-and-recommendations/BSAC-proposals-for-possible-ways-forward-to-improv/BSACrepytoeelFINAL1092017CORR050917.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB>

<sup>6</sup> Member States are required to improve the ecological status or potential of waterbodies under the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC  
[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:5c835afb-2ec6-4577-bdf8-756d3d694eeb.0004.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:5c835afb-2ec6-4577-bdf8-756d3d694eeb.0004.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

The BSAC underlines that dam owners and hydropower companies have a responsibility here. There is a range of demonstrated and proven measures that can be applied in order to reduce eel mortality, especially for downstream passages at dams. There has also been much research into ways to improve survival rates in pumps and other common migration barriers.

**The BSAC proposes** that Member States establish a concrete five-year plan on how to address the most important water bodies, with a set target of 90% survival of eel and other migrating fish escaping to the sea.

### **Eel recovery and Member State eel management plans**

The Council Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel has been in place since 2007 (EC 2007/1100).<sup>7</sup> A quick fix in helping the recovery of eel is not possible. The eel has a generation cycle of around 15 years, which is also highlighted in the Commission's external evaluation, concluded in June 2019.<sup>8</sup>

The evaluation of the Eel Regulation concluded that national implementation has been slow and patchy, and needs considerable improvement, especially when addressing non-fisheries related anthropogenic mortality.<sup>9</sup> The BSAC thus calls on Baltic Member States to give an update on their national eel management plans, including actions to protect the eel throughout its lifecycle, and efforts made and put into place to decrease factors causing anthropogenic mortality.

### **Other factors to be taken into account**

The following are additional factors that have been raised by the BSAC in its work and meetings:

Predation from cormorants and herons has increased considerably over the last decades and could have a significant impact.

The occurrence of a parasitic nematode in the swim bladder is believed to have severe negative consequences for the ability of the silver eel to survive the trans-Atlantic migration.

Toxic substances such as PCBs stored in the adipose tissue and released during migration when the eel lives on stored energy are under suspicion for preventing successful spawning.

Viral infections (e.g. herpes virus HVA) are thought to play a significant role.

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

<sup>8</sup> Huntington, T., et al. (2019) Evaluation of the Eel Regulation Final report. doi: 10.2771/679816 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/afe6ca55-5f58-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>9</sup> See the Executive Summary of the Evaluation report, pp. 14 - 20.