

## EFARO<sup>1</sup> webinar on European eel management

7<sup>th</sup> May 2025

### Background

In order to enable recovery of the eel population, the European Commission has obliged Member States through the Eel Regulation to draw up Eel Management Plans, including a description of management measures. Examples of such measure include: removing physical barriers, the release of glass eel, a release obligation for anglers and a closed season for eel fishing. In this EFARO workshop the possibilities and limitations of EMPs in eel management & recovery, as well as the most important ways forward to achieve better knowledge for better eel management were discussed.

### Speakers:

- **Niki Sporrong, Fisheries Secretariat**
- **Andrew Kerr, Sustainable Eel Group**

Luc van Hoof from EFARO moderated the meeting.

**Niki Sporrong, Fisheries Secretariat** gave a presentation on the measures for recovery of European eel. The Eel Regulation was put in place in 2007, together with the CITES listing. Eel is listed on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List since 2008. Multiple causes are believed to be behind the decline of the eel, among others land use, pollution, fisheries. Since 2021, ICES advice is zero catch of all life stages in all habitats, including eels used for restocking and aquaculture. In 2022, the 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. She pointed to the several layers of management structures concerning eel, among others the EU Regulation 1100/2007 setting out measures for the recovery of eel. In line with the CFP objectives, eel stocks should be well below potential biological limit reference points. There are no signs of recovery of the eel since the implementation of the Regulation. The EU agreed to further measures in 2017, and extended eel fishing closure to 6 months in December 2022. There is also an EU-wide ban on recreational fishing for eel in marine waters. Further measures are set out in the Marine Action Plan, including revision of national EMPs. There are also regional commitments under HELCOM, OSPAR and GFCM/Barcelona as well as global efforts under CITES and CMS. Niki Sporrong referred to the effectiveness of the EU management, including the eel management plans implemented at national level. Each plan should aim to reduce anthropogenic mortality to permit escapement of 40% of silver eel. The Regulation specifies that *the objective of each Eel Management Plan shall be to reduce anthropogenic mortalities so as to permit with high probability 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. The Eel Management Plan shall be prepared with the purpose of achieving this objective in the long term<sup>2</sup>. An Eel Management Plan may contain, but is not limited to, the following measures: reducing commercial fishing activity, restricting recreational fishing — restocking measures, structural*

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<sup>1</sup> EFARO, the organization of European Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Organizations

<sup>2</sup> [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32007R1100](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32007R1100)

*measures to make rivers passable and improve river habitats, together with other environmental measures, — transportation of silver eel from inland waters to waters from which they can escape freely to the Sargasso Sea, — combating predators, temporary switching-off of hydro-electric power turbines. National management plans differ.* This makes the implementation of the Regulation difficult. The regulation is evaluated every 3 years. No progress shown in achieving objectives in 2022. In 2025 the evaluation<sup>3</sup> pointed to the inconsistencies in reporting and high anthropogenic mortality. ICES has evaluated the EU Member States' progress reports against the escapement biomass target defined in Regulation (EU, 2007; also referred to as the Eel Regulation) and the theoretical lifetime anthropogenic mortality threshold implied by the escapement target. ICES notes major limitations in reporting with biomass and mortality indicators being reported for less than 50% of eel management units (EMUs). No overall progress has been made in achieving the EU-defined biomass escapement target: the target was met or exceeded in only 23% of the reporting EMUs (as compared to 41% in the first year of reporting), and a consistently increasing trend in escapement was detected in only one EMU. No clear patterns for mortalities were observed. Mortality was lower in 59% of the reporting EMUs compared to the first year of reporting, but it increased in 29% of them.

The presenter referred to the possibilities and limitations of the EU regulation. The Regulation offers flexibility (sky is the limit) and a wide range of approaches, but is not aligned with the CFP and Lisbon Treaty. There is no timetable for reaching the objectives and no regional coherence.

Fish Sec recommendations are to follow scientific advice, close fisheries at all life stages, allow no recreational fishing, implement further measures to improve habitats, aim at greater integration with Water Framework Directive, and introduce regionally coordinated closures to protect migration. Greater understanding of natural recruitment and role of eels in the ecosystem needed. All restocking above migration barriers should be stopped.

**A fisheries representative from Denmark** underlined that eel conservation must be seen in a wider context. He underlined that eel conservation and management goes far beyond the management of commercial and recreational fisheries. He pointed to the fact that the pristine biomass of eel (without any anthropogenic influence) is not known. Despite a massive decline in recruitment there is no disaster in the biomass of adult eels. The information provided by fishers should be taken into account in the eel management.

**Andrew Kerr, Sustainable Eel Group<sup>4</sup> – presentation.**

The Sustainable Eel Group promotes eel recovery through protection and sustainable use. SEG sets its own standards. Its vision covers biologically safe wild eel populations, distributed throughout their natural range, fulfilling their role in the aquatic environment, recovering in line with the protection targeted by the Eel Regulation. The aim of the SEG standard is to define criteria by which each step in the chain of custody in the commercial eel sector can be assessed for its responsible minimisation of negative impacts and contribution to the protection and recovery of the eel population. Application of the SEG standard by itself, therefore, does not guarantee to provide adequate protection to achieve a sustainable fishery or recovery: on its own the commercial sector is not able to achieve these shared objectives. Whilst contributing to the shared objectives as a responsible actor, the certified commercial sector cannot be held responsible for the net outcome as influenced by all parties. It is only in the national Eel Management Plans (EMPs) and the Eel Regulation, that all factors and all actors can be addressed, and therefore, it is only at this level that

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fishsec.org/app/uploads/2022/06/EU-request-for-technical-evaluation-of-the-Eel-Management-Plan-progress-reports-2022.pdf#:~:text=ICES%20has%20evaluated%20the%20EU%20Member%20Sta>

<sup>4</sup> [Sustainable Eel Group | The Sustainable Eel Group Accelerating the recovery of the European Eel](#)

the net outcome can be evaluated. The SEG standard discourages illegal fishing and trafficking by excluding those who have been prosecuted from certification (as courts often don't ban fishing or trade at sentencing).

Recommendation of SEG<sup>5</sup> were presented. There is evidence that the eel regulation is slowly working. Full implementation of the regulation is the way forward. On silver eel escapement – it is crucial to get more silver eel to escape to the sea. Time to focus on all causes of eel mortality. SEG believe in collaboration in all corners of the eel world to produce a collective outcome.

The most important recommendation: Eel needs its own advisory council as a general forum to orchestrate eel improvement.

**In the course of the discussion** it was underlined that more attention is needed to pollution and WFD. Pollution affects migration capabilities of eel.

A question "does restocking work for restoring the eel population" (beyond having a local effect) was brought forward. Knowledge gaps related to the eel must be filled.

**Diverse and inclusive platform such as an advisory council for management is needed.**

EFARO will aim at organising a 'follow up' meeting with the contribution of the two speakers that could not make it to the meeting (among them a representative of the Commission) and as suggested by a representative of the fisheries sector, will include a contribution from fishers.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SEG-Recommendations-2024.pdf>