



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

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Background

European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is listed as critically endangered (one step away from extinct in the wild) in [HELCOM Red List of Baltic Sea species in danger of becoming extinct](#) (CR A3bde+4bde), European and [IUCN](#) red list (CR A2bd+4bd). Eel is also listed under:

- [Appendix II of CITES](#) (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) since 2009. This means that exports outside of Europe have been banned because of the decline in recruitment and stocks, however, trade continues within the EU.
- [Appendix II of CMS](#) (the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals), since 2015, covering migratory species which have an unfavourable conservation status and which require international agreements for their conservation and management, as well as those which have a conservation status which would significantly benefit from the international cooperation that could be achieved by an international agreement ([Art.II-3, IV](#)). [ASCOBANS](#) is one example of such agreements.

The EU in 2007 jointly decided on a management plan for the recovery of the eel stock. The Member States are required to take measures to secure that 40% of adult eels reach the sea for migration to spawning grounds. It is the Member States own responsibility to take relevant measures, and the Commission reviewed the measures so far. The [EC evaluation](#) made in 2014 states that "the state of the stock of European eel remains critical and a precautionary approach should be adopted until there is certain evidence of a sustained increase in recruitment and the adult stock". HELCOM Contracting Parties in [2013](#) to enhance co-ordination of BSAP measures for the conservation of eel stocks, and to consider additional measures if necessary, such as reducing fishing mortality in accordance with the ICES Advice.

The scientific advice ([ICES 2014](#)) for eel reads accordingly: "The status of eel remains critical and ICES advises that all anthropogenic mortality (e.g. recreational and commercial fishing, hydropower, pumping stations, and pollution) affecting production and escapement of silver eels should be reduced to – or kept as close to – zero as possible."

However, this fishery is allowed at the same time as the EC, the European Parliament and the EU Member States in the new CFP have agreed to follow scientific advice when adopting total annual quotas and management plans and that all stocks should reach MSY before 2015 (or at the latest by 2020).

Baltic environmental NGO's, including CCB, have raised their [concerns](#) in 2015 with regards to the state of population of European eels and called the European Commission for immediate actions to halt the human induced eel mortality until the stock has reached a level that permits sustainable fishery (see [attached](#)).

As outlined above, the listing of European eel under the CMS, Appendix II [provides an opportunity for further co-operative management and conservation actions](#), e.g. MOU/agreement to recognize the importance of European eel's conservation and management globally.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to [consider](#) potential joint application of HELCOM Contracting Parties for development and conclusion of a global agreement under the CMS to protect the European eel population, contributing to achievement of Good Environmental Status both under the HELCOM BSAP and EU MSFD. The following steps could be considered:

- HELCOM, potentially jointly with OSPAR, liaise with Bonn Convention Secretariat (CMS) and Sargasso Sea Commission (initiators of listing under CMS) on approach/roadmap for formulating a globally-binding agreement
- Conclusive proposals for a legal instrument should be elaborated aiming at *i.a.*:
 - jointly combating IUU, e.g. joint inspection program, improvement of traceability of eel, requiring license to buy eel fishing gears and banning sales of second hand gears
 - improving and harmonizing data collection
 - sharing experience and knowledge on mortality mitigation at hydropower plants
 - creating joint recommendations on, if at all, rearing and releasing is to take place

Efforts for the endangered eel

Dear Commissioner

Almost 8 years ago the Council adopted "Regulation No. 1100/2007 of 18th September 2007 on measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel. The EU Eel Management Plan calls for each river system to reach 40% of pristine silver eel escapement and 50% reduction in marine fishing mortality. In parallel it accepts extensive stocking as a tool to reach these targets.

However, according to the evaluation made by the European Commission released in October last year "the state of the stock of European eel remains critical and a precautionary approach should be adopted until there is certain evidence of a sustained increase in recruitment and the adult stock"¹. The fact is that the stock is so low, that it according to the IUCN is "Critically Endangered". The response to this situation is that the ICES advice for 2015 for eel reads accordingly:

"The status of eel remains critical and ICES advises that all anthropogenic mortality (e.g. recreational and commercial fishing, hydropower, pumping stations, and pollution) affecting production and escapement of silver eels should be reduced to – or kept as close to – zero as possible."

Same scientific advice has been given since 2007.

We therefore find it incomprehensible, short sighted and extremely concerning that the Commission still allows extensive fishing on this critically endangered species. It is not for the benefit of the ability to restore a favorable conservation status, and consequently the possibility of eventually reestablishing a sustainable fishery on the species. A species with a population size of well under 1/10 of previous levels.

This fishery is allowed at the same time as the Commission, the Parliament and Member States in the new CFP have agreed to follow scientific advice when adopting total annual quotas and management plan and that all stocks should reach MSY before 2015 (or at the latest by 2020)². Extensive non-sustainable commercial exploitation of a critically endangered species is also in no way consistent with the obligations the EU has under the CBD. We also wish to draw your attention to the fact that had the eel been included in Annex II or Annex IV of the Habitats Directive, fishing of European eel would have been terminated long ago. May we therefore remind you that the

Commission has the possibility to close this fishery in accordance with article 12 of the Basic Regulation¹ We also ask you to swiftly follow your own advice in the newly conducted evaluation and "consider ways and means to assess the effectiveness of the Eel regulation, including a possible review"¹.

We would also like to emphasize that lack of free passage upstream and downstream European freshwater systems currently poses another major obstacle to eel. Member States lack of action within this area was also pointed out in the recent evaluation²

We hence expect that the Commission, as guardian of the correct implementation of the Water Framework Directive, ensure that free migratory routes for migratory fish species is secured in all European rivers.

Undersigning parties kindly urge you to take immediate actions to halt the human induced eel mortality until the stock has reached a level that permits sustainable fishery.

On behalf of the signing organizations,
Yours sincerely



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¹ COM (2014) 640 final REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. On the outcome of the implementation of the Eel Management Plans, including an evaluation of the measures concerning restocking and of the evolution of market prices for eels less than 12 cm in length

² REGULATION (EU) No 1380/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC