

Agenda Items

1. SEG is conservation and science led organisation, dedicated to the recovery of the European eel
2. Glass eel and adult eel abundance
3. The importance of fishing to enable re-stocking, and therefore the support of the eel management plans across Europe and in Germany
4. The importance of the eel to the economy of Europe – for commercial fishing, food and sport fishing and conservation
5. How the Sustainable Eel Standard is helping to develop sustainable fishing and farming and a whole sustainable supply chain
6. How SEG is working with partners across Europe and North Africa to help a sustainable future for the eel

1. **SEG is a conservation and science led Non Government Organisation dedicated to the recovery of the eel.** Our strategies and activities to support this overall aim are:

- **Conservation projects:** allocating grant funding (**£1M EFF projects funding in 2012-13**), resources and influencing to reduce and remove the migratory blockages for glass eels to populate more freshwaters, and silver eels to escape to spawn. Stocking of elvers to under-used habitat – e.g. Llangorse Lake (Wales), transporting Glass eels over barriers on the River Severn this year, Dupan transporting Silver eels over the Dyke to the sea in Holland. There are 70,000 barriers to migration for the eel in Europe. So far only 500 have been rectified.
- **Commitment to the Eel Regulation and Eel Management Plans.** Support to and influencing of members states to meet their commitments
- **Evidence, Education, & Awareness.** Our strategies are informed by the best available evidence and we commission gaps in our knowledge (e.g. Pawson Stocking review). We also support other education and awareness initiatives – e.g. the Eels in Schools project. **We should await the latest ICES Review of evidence in June 2013 before making revisions to the Eel Regulation.**
- **Development and promotion of the Sustainable Eel Standard**
- **Sustainable Development & Recovery.** By the Brundtland definition of sustainability, recovery must balance the social, economic and environmental needs.

2. **Glass eel and adult eel abundance.**

- Glass eel arrivals have increased in the past 3 seasons, with those this year their best for 10 - 15 years. This does not prove a sustained return to abundance, but similarly **indicates that the eel is not perilously close to extinction and requiring an immediate halt in fishing.** The number of Glass eels arriving at the coast of Europe is estimated to be as low as 150 tonnes (500 Million fish) in 2008/09 to 1000 tonnes (3 billion fish) in 2012/13. The sudden variation in numbers also suggests that the most significant factor affecting Glass eel arrivals is survival at sea – most likely climatic – and little influenced by anthropogenic impacts. It is unlikely that reductions in fishing and habitat improvements 2 – 4 years ago would have led to a 6 fold increase in Glass eel numbers already.

- Whilst the biggest concern has been the decline in recruitment (glass eel arrivals), the decline in the adult stock has not been so significant. This suggests that adult populations are density dependent and are making good and consistent use of the reduced habitat available to them. i.e.: (1) more glass eels won't lead to more adult eels unless we can make more freshwater habitat available and (2) surplus glass eels can therefore be put to better use for the stock by relocating them.

3. Fishing actually helps the Eel

- Glass eels are most abundant on the West coast of Europe. To make the best use of the stock, surplus Glass eels are relocated from there to areas of Europe where Eel arrivals are low. This has happened for over 100 years in some places – since 1908 in Germany.
- Accelerating stock recovery through efficient use of "lost" glass eels: The restocking or transfer of eels is an European obligation (for the States with glass eel fisheries) and the only urgent measure that can offset degradation in the quality and accessibility of eel habitats until their recovery is complete. Restocking aims to increase the number of healthy spawners that can reproduce and therefore accelerate eel stock recovery.
- A number of member states rely on restocking to support their eel management plans
- The Pawson report emphasised the importance of restocking of surplus eels to under-used habitat to maintain and improve the European Eel population
- Catching Glass eels for restocking can only be done by fishing. And to maximise survival this is best done by responsible, sustainable and controlled means
- Fishing is necessary to catch and transport adult eels past barriers. For example, the Dutch 'Eels Over the Dyke' project by the Dupan Foundation transported 4,252 kilos of adult eels (6,921 fish) past macerating pumps from freshwater to sea in the autumn of 2012.
- The presence of legal fishermen acts as a deterrent to illegal fishing
- Some Glass eels can be grown on for the table. Survival is over 90% in fish farms (compared to 10% in the wild) providing an important food source with efficient use of the stock and maintaining economic activity and interest in the eel. Growing eels in fish farms for the table reduces the fishing pressure on wild eel populations
- With 70,000 barriers to eel migration, Glass eels have limited habitat they can populate. Saving more Glass eels by stopping fishing won't give them any more habitat to use.
- Due to the cold spring slowing down Glass eel catches in the UK, the British Government and Environment Agency has agreed to extend the fishing season, if necessary, to allow enough Glass eels to be caught to fulfil re-stocking programmes in the UK and across Europe
- Fisheries have regulations to ensure that they are not overfished – e.g. close periods (days of the week of no fishing), close seasons, no fishing near obstructions, restrictions to net sizes and other methods
- **Fishing is therefore vital to the sustainable management of the eel stock. To stop fishing would be a much greater detriment than to continue it on a sustainable basis**
- **We do not support the unsustainable practice of catching Glass eels for direct consumption (ie. of Glass eels). SEG would support an amendment to stop the trade in dead Glass eels and the catching, buying and selling for consumption as baby eels.**

4. The importance of eel to the economy of Europe – for commercial fishing, food and sport fishing and conservation

- Across Europe the eel fishing and food industry is estimated at employing over 4000 people and worth 500M Euros per annum.
- If people didn't eat eel, and it wasn't so important to our economies, we would probably not be interested in conserving it.
- European economies need growth. Maintaining a sustainable industry can support that growth.
- Stopping fishing will have a negative impact on economies. In France alone the compensation for closing fisheries is estimated at €80M.
- Eels also have an important but unknown amount of economic benefit to conservation. They are an important part of the aquatic ecosystem and provide food for important species such as otters and herons.

5. How the Sustainable Eel Standard is helping to develop sustainable fishing and farming and a whole sustainable supply chain

- We believe that fishing should only be supported where it is controlled, restricted, done sustainably and for the right reasons (i.e. for re-stocking and for adults for the table – we do not support the consumption of Glass eels)
- The Standard prescribes high standards for each part of the supply chain, from fishing, to buying & handling, to farming and restocking. Operators must be able to demonstrate that they achieve these high standards.
- For example, a fishery only passes the Standard if it is achieving the 40% silver eel escapement target, or if the data is unreliable, there is credible progress with the Eel Management Plan
- Also, the Standard requires low mortality rates at each stage in the supply chain. This is driving more sustainable practices – e.g. previously in France, as many as 50% of Glass eels died soon after being caught by boat. Those wishing to meet the Standard are now using more careful techniques to meet the maximum 5% mortality rate specified by the Standard. This means that millions of Glass eels are no longer being wasted.
- Over half the eel industry in Europe has achieved the Sustainable Eel Standard in the past 2 years
- The Standard is driving responsible and sustainable practices throughout the supply chain, educating operators in the importance of conserving the eel and maximising survival at every stage. Packages of sustainably handled eel, whether live for restocking or processed for the table, can carry the SEG eco-label to show the customer it is from a sustainable source.

6. How SEG is working with partners across Europe and North Africa to help a sustainable future for the eel

- The European Eel is one stock so needs a Europe-wide solution. Partnerships have developed and are increasing across Europe and North Africa to influence and inspire co-ordinated action to conserve the eel. Conferences and meetings are held several times a year to share information and influence action.
- There is significant membership from the UK, Ireland, France, Holland, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Italy Greece, Tunisia and Morocco. We have direct contact with 500 people in 22 countries.