



European
Commission

Rebuilding the European eel stock and sustainability of sectors: silver eel capture and release

24 April 2024 – 10:00 – 17:00 – ONLINE VIA WEBEX – ENGLISH ONLY

Intersessional technical workshop of the Joint Special Group under the EU Marine Action Plan and the Eel Regulation

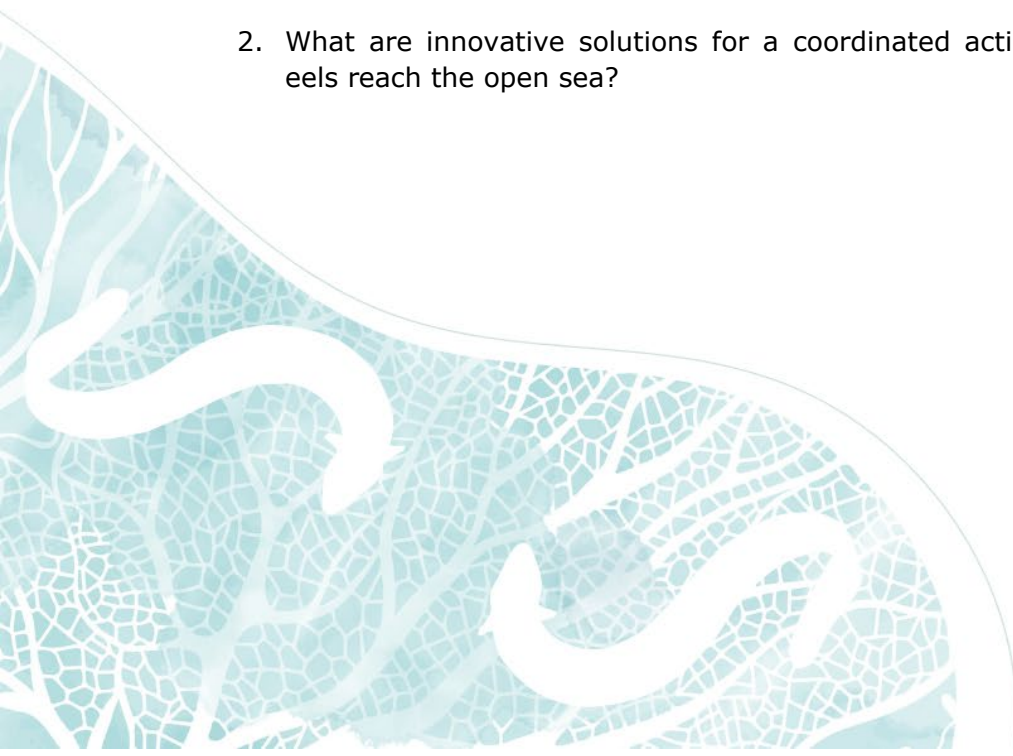
DRAFT AGENDA

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 10:00 – 10:15 | Connecting to the meeting |
| 10:15 – 10:25 | Welcome and house-keeping rules |
| 10:25 – 10:40 | Opening by Valérie TANKINK
European Commission DG MARE Head of Unit D3 |
| 10:40 – 10:50 | Presentation: The trinity of management, science and practitioners - a testimonial from German federal research
Jan-Dag POHLMANN, scientist for DCF data collection, Thünen Institute of Fisheries Ecology, DE |
| 10:50 – 11:10 | Presentation: Mitigating the impact of hydropower on silver eel escapement in Ireland
Ciara O'LEARY, Senior Research Officer, Inland Fisheries Ireland, IE |
| 11:10 – 11:30 | Presentation: The SUDOANG project: Engaging Stakeholders for the Conservation of European Eel
Estibaliz DÍAZ, Head of Sustainable Fisheries Management, AZTI, ES |
| 11:30 – 11:40 | <i>Coffee break</i> |

11:40 – 11:50	Presentation on projects in a cooperation with the hydropower energy companies (title TBC) Erik SPARREVIK, Senior Environmental Specialist, Vattenfall Hydro, SE
11:50 – 12:10	Presentation: Criteria for identifying free-flowing river stretches for the EU Biodiversity Strategy and Restoration Law Wouter VAN DE BUND, Scientific Project Manager, Joint Research Centre, Ispra, IT
12:10 – 12:30	Presentation: Analysis of EMFF and EMFAF funding in support of the Eel Regulation Tim Huntington, FAMENET
12:30 – 13:30	<i>Lunch break</i>
13:30 – 15:00	Tour de table
15:00 – 15:10	<i>Coffee break</i>
15:10 – 16:30	Tour de table
16:30 – 17:00	Wrap up and closing

GUIDING QUESTIONS for a *tour de table* discussion and to prepare up front:

1. What are your good practices and success stories on the silver eel capture and release? How to scale them up at EU level?
2. What are innovative solutions for a coordinated actions to help silver migrating eels reach the open sea?



Annex – Workshop’s format, objectives, and the background

Participants

Participants will include representatives from Member States authorities (coastal and landlocked countries) responsible for the implementation of the Eel Regulation/Eel Management Plans (at national and regional level), Water Framework Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive representing fisheries and environment authorities, possibly also from energy ministries, fisheries control bodies, as well as Advisory Councils (ACs), sector representatives (marine, coastal and inland fisheries), NGOs, invited scientists.

Format and time

24 April 2024 (Wednesday) 10:00-17:00 with 1h lunch break

Online platform (Webex)

Language: English (no interpretation).

Objectives

This workshop is convened to:

- explore means to **make capture and release** = trap and transport (T&T)/translocation to facilitate seaward migration of silver eels (assisted migration) **operational on an EU scale** in each relevant river basin, **while being adequately supported and monitored**, and without prejudice to the full range of actions foreseen in the Eel Management Plans, the Eel Regulation and relevant environmental legislation for the longer term.
- **share concrete examples of success stories** (good and responsible practices that could be upscaled in various regions/countries).

Focusing presentations and discussions on the actions on catch and release (trap and transport) of silver eels as most urgent to maximise the success in short term will allow asking questions WHO and HOW. The design, implementation, monitoring and regulation of any effective T&T scheme requires substantial time and financial investment. Showcasing concrete examples of success stories, discussing challenges (including governance, resources, control) and enablers/incentives (including EU funding) will help addressing the challenges.

Enhancing the coordination and cooperation for the implementation of effective and efficient conservation and management measures for eels with a focus on catch and release of mature eels will boost the management success by showcasing an involvement of fishers (and other stakeholders) in catching eels for conservation purpose/benefits, adjusted to local and regional conditions.

Expected outcomes

Participants will:

- gain better understanding of the urgency and feasibility of capture and release (trap and transport) programmes as an operational conservation measure to help eel spawner migration and its survival; which in turn will
- enhance the governance for implementing the conservation measures in focus and for strengthening the interlinkages between fisheries and environment policies and management.

This workshop will be an opportunity to discuss concrete conservation measures, share good practices and programmes in different countries, foster constructive dialogue between fisheries and environmental communities and more widely among stakeholders. It will also facilitate Member States coordinated actions to enhance the conservation and management for European eel with a focus on catch and release actions to help the eel spawners reach the waters from where they can freely escape to an open sea. The workshop can be an inspiration for Member States in view of revising their eel management plans under the Eel Regulation and the Marine Action Plan and ultimately to enhance the escapement of silver eels to the open sea.

Background

The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) remains in critical condition, the whole stock is well below safe biological limits, and eel fisheries, including for restocking and aquaculture purposes, are not sustainable. ICES advises zero catch of eels in all habitats in both recreational and commercial fisheries (including for restocking and aquaculture purposes), that non-fisheries related anthropogenic mortality should be zero and that quality and quantity of habitats should be restored (including restoring connectivity and the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the habitats). ICES also acknowledges that catches for subsequent release to improve eel survival (e.g. where dams exist and prevent downstream or upstream migration of silver and glass eel, transfer across barriers within the same waterbody) may be part of temporary conservation measures if the associated mortality is less than that in the absence of such measures¹.

The success of measures for the recovery of European eel and for the sustainable use of this stock requires better implementation of the Eel Regulation, including through close cooperation and coherent action at EU, MS, local and regional level (diverse conditions require specific solutions), as well as on information, consultation and involvement of the sectors involved. Transboundary effects of all programmes and measures should be coordinated across eel river basin.

To better protect, conserve and enhance the aquatic environment where the eel spends the coastal and freshwater phases of its life, it is necessary to ensure consistency between the measures the Member States take under the Eel Regulation and those under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Habitats Directive.

¹ ICES. 2023. European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) throughout its natural range. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2023. ICES Advice 2023, ele.2737.nea. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.21907860>

As confirmed by the scientific advice concerning the implementation of the Eel Regulation and by the Commission's evaluation of the Eel Regulation, there is no real progress by Member States in achieving the objectives of this Regulation, notably the 40% biomass escapement, and there are no signs of eel recovery. Implementation of conservation and management measures in the fisheries and environment areas is uneven, which hampers the recovery of the eel stock. Also, the effectiveness of measures is difficult to assess.

The review of the eel conservation challenges shows that:

1. Member States face challenges in the governance/coordination to deal with this long-lived migratory species with a complex life cycle (marine and freshwater), complex regulatory frameworks and resource availability (human and financial).
2. Member States experience significant problems in restoring river continuity and eel habitats, particularly with respect to the access of silver eel to the sea.
3. The state of the stock is so extremely depleted that very urgent measures are needed to maximise the spawning success as much as possible in the very short term.

This **situation requires directing efforts in the very short term to enhance the governance and ensure that silver eels can reach the sea**, even in those rivers with heavy installations of hydroelectric turbines or other obstacles. Capture and transport or trap and transport schemes enable the substantial numbers of adult eels currently held within landlocked areas to undertake seaward migration and potentially contribute to the oceanic spawning stock. Financial support from EU funds, including EMFAF, is available to support Member States in implementing a variety of conservation measures benefiting eel recovery.

The **Marine Action Plan** aims at building bridges between fisheries and environmental communities, enhancing the governance, improving the science base and enforcement, and supporting a fair and just transition – all relevant for the conservation and management of eel. More specifically, it calls on Member States to improve the implementation of conservation measures notably by adopting and updating their national eel management plans in full coherence with the relevant environmental legislations (WFD, MSFD, Habitats Directive) by end of June 2024. To facilitate this process, the Commission has updated the guidance for the preparation and modification of the Eel Management Plan (EMP) that was shared with Member States for their comments and is organising this workshop.

