

POLICY BACKGROUND

Policy-relevant issues in Aquaculture & Fisheries

Restocking: the eel case



General introduction to the Policy background of Restocking: the eel case

The European eel stock is in decline in almost the whole of its distribution area. Overall, recruitment of glass eels from the Atlantic Ocean fell in the 1980s to about 10% of former levels, followed by a further decline to 1-5% since 2000. Fishery catches have gradually declined over the second half of the 20th century, down to less than half the former level. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) considers that the stock is outside safe biological limits and that current fisheries are not sustainable. Therefore, ICES (1999-2006) advised that an international stock protection and recovery plan should be developed, and that fisheries and other anthropogenic impacts be restricted to as close to zero as possible until such a plan has been implemented.

EU policies

The alarming information about the status of the European eel resulted in a Policy statement of the EU-commission on 2 October 2003.

“Commission proposes EU action to protect European eels (2 October 2003)

The European Commission has adopted a Communication on the development of a Community Action Plan for the management of European eels. This stock is currently outside safe biological limits. This is mostly due to fishing at unsustainable levels and the effects of other human activity on the eels’ habitats and migratory patterns. As eels are to be found at various stages of their life-cycle in the waters of the northern Atlantic and then in fresh and brackish waters in almost all of Europe and northern Africa, co-ordinated conservation measures are needed to safeguard the stock. This is why the Commission proposes that eel management be built up from a set of local actions to be put in place by the Member States according to an agreed standard. These actions should ensure the survival and the migration of the eel in all its habitats. While this plan is being developed, the Commission will propose urgent measures to ensure that mature eels can migrate back to the sea to spawn. The Commission intends to formulate the urgent measures at the beginning of next year and the long-term management system at the end of 2004.”

According to the above statement of the EU-commission, urgent management tools were required to ensure sustainable exploitation of the European eel. The statement was the beginning of the efforts the Commission has made towards the recovery of the European Eel stock:

- 2003: Commission presented Action Plan for management of European Eel (COM 2003, 573)
- Oct 2005: Proposal for a Proposal a Council Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel- COM(2005)472 final.
- April 2006: European Parlement proposed amendments
- May 2006: COM responded with amended proposal.
- 2006-2007: Intensive, in in-depth discussions
- 11 June 2007: Adoption of the Regulation

Areas covered by the newly adopted Eel Regulation

Community maritime waters and inland waters of Member States that flow into ICES areas III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, IX and the Mediterranean.

The core of the newly adopted Eel Regulation is to have Tailor-made management plans. The reason for this is because the characteristics of river basins vary enormously in Ecology, Biochemistry and their Human activities (fishing, h/e power stations, dams, pollution etc.).

Therefore each member state is asked to submit a separate Eel Management Plan (EMP) for (each eel river basin (or one covering its entire territory). Member states must designate “eel river basins” or natural eel habitat. This means that Member states sharing a river basin are to jointly prepare plans (also with 3rd countries).

The goal of the EMP is that 40% of silver eel biomass must be allowed to escape to the sea (or downstream). The goal has a long-term objective which takes at least 2-3 eel generations

The deadline for the EMP is 31 December 2008 but it is foreseen that it will take longer. Due to that, each country has to make at least a plan for their territory. If the member states fail to submit an adequate EMP for their territory on time, their fishing effort will be reduced with 50% relative to average catch of 2004-2006.

EMP's may contain, but aren't limited to:

- fishing effort reduction (commercial and recreational)
- restocking measures
- structural measures / river continuity
- combating predators
- closure or temporary switching of hydro-electric power stations
- protection of the turbines

Plans must include non-fishery measures unless these aren't necessary to attain 40% escape target and 60% of eel <12cm long are to be used in restocking, aiming to increase escapement of silver eel to the sea. (Start at 35%, reach 60% by 2013).

EMP's must indicate timescale for reaching the target and measures to be taken in the 1st year of application. The EMP's shall be approved by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF). EMP's will be subject to modification / improvement in view of new scientific info/data and changes in stock status.

Member states must report to the COM every 3 years (then every 6) on:

- The % of biomass of silver eel escaping to the sea
- The level of fishing effort and reductions thereof
- The mortality caused by non-fisheries factors and the reductions thereof
- The amount of glass eel caught and the % of these used for different purposes (consumption, aquaculture, restocking etc.)

The COM will report (after 4-5 years) to EP and Council on the outcome of the implementation of EMP's, up to that date.

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Control and Enforcement

In Community Maritime Waters: Reg. 2371/2002 (on conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the CFP) applies.

In Inland Waters: member states may establish their own control system, adapted to their situation and legal framework already in place. Member states will establish lists of:

- Vessels flying their flag, fishing for eel in Community maritime waters
- Authorizations or licenses to fish for eel in inland waters

Statements released by the Commission at the Council of Ministers on June 11 & 12 2007

Statement 1: The 40% objective is calculated as an average for all the waters of a Member State.

Statement 2: The Commission will propose restrictions on international trade in European eel, while fully respecting the EC's obligations to the WTO. In addition, the eel is included in CITES Annex II.

Statement 3: If the price paid by restockers falls to 20% lower than the international market price, the obligations to reserve a certain % for restocking will be temporarily lowered.

What happens next?

The Commission is preparing a standard form which Member States must follow when preparing their EMP's. This will facilitate the preparation and evaluation of the plans. A group of experts will be consulted prior to releasing the final draft.

Summaries

The summaries (Technical Leaflets) on past and current research projects related to eel in aquaculture are given in the following pages of this section.

- EELREP
- SILVEREEL
- SLIME

Footnote

- This chapter has been abridged from the Final report of the Slime project and from the presentation given by Christos Theophilou, DG Fish at the INDIGANG Colloque Final seminar (19 & 20 June 2007).