

Press Release

Management of European eel not at all in line with zero catch advice

European eel remains critically endangered with recruitment under 10 % of historical levels. The International Exploration of the Sea, ICES, published its [scientific advice on fishing opportunities and conservation for European eel for 2025](#) today. As in previous years, ICES advises zero catch for all life stages, all uses and in all habitats. The conservation advice is to reduce other human-related mortalities to zero and restore habitats.

The scientific advice on European eel makes very clear that no catches can be considered sustainable and that the “zero catch” also applies to glass eel landings for restocking and aquaculture. The message is reinforced by the advice on conservation aspects, highlighting the need to reduce other anthropogenic mortalities to zero, as well as restore both the quantity and quality of eel habitats.

The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) has been listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN since 2008, and is on the European Red List for freshwater fish. It is also included in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 2007.

Despite the need for protection and efforts to aid its recovery, European eel continues to be fished across most of its natural range. In the past decade, total reported commercial landings of yellow and silver eel have remained above 2 000 tonnes per year, with several countries reporting annual landings of over 100 tonnes according to ICES. Over the same time period, commercial glass eel landings remained at an average of 57.4 tonnes. Where available, estimates of recreational landings of yellow and silver eels show that they can be of the same order of magnitude as those of commercial fisheries. All in contradiction with the scientific advice. Only Ireland, Slovenia, Malta and Norway have closed all fishing for the species.

Management in the EU is primarily through the *Council Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel*. However, a 2022 [Special Request Advice from ICES](#) on its implementation showed that no overall progress has been made in reaching the objective on increased silver eel escapement.

The need for further measures to aid eel recovery has been debated and implemented across and beyond the EU, but these are not sufficient. Eel fishing closures, together with a complete ban of recreational fishing, intended to protect eel migration and recruitment have been adopted in EU marine waters, yet fishing mortality for both glass eels and silver eels remain too high. In the Mediterranean, temporary management measures for European eel were agreed in 2018. Next week the General Fisheries Committee for the Mediterranean (GFCM) is expected to agree on long-term management measures for the region.

– *Current management of European eel is clearly not at all in line with the scientific advice, says Niki Sporrøng, Senior Policy Officer & European eel Project Manager at FishSec. Agreed fisheries and biodiversity objectives to rebuild fish stocks are simply not applied to European eel. These commitments need to be implemented now, in both national inland, EU and international waters.*

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Notes to editors:

[1] The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) population has been declining for a long time and is classified as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 2018).

[2] The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) data on recruitment shows a dramatic decline since the assessment baseline (1960-1979), and no significant recovery. Glass eel recruitment continues to be very low. This year, the estimate for the North Sea area is 1.1 % of the baseline average and for “elsewhere Europe” 7.2 %. Yellow eel recruitment in 2023 was 11.4 %.

[3] Assessment of European eel is complex due to the great geographical range of the population, including a number of countries outside of the ICES areas. This makes it impossible for ICES to use fishing mortality, Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and other standard reference points for eel. As data on eel fisheries and other anthropogenic impacts remain incomplete, the assessment is based on time series for glass eel and yellow eel recruitment. Even without defined biological limit reference points, it is ICES assessment that the European eel population remains well below any potential reference points, such as $MSY_{Btrigger}$ and B_{pa}/B_{lim} .

[4] ICES has advised that all anthropogenic mortality should be kept as close to zero as possible since 2003 (ICES, 2020). Since 2021, the advice has changed to zero for all anthropogenic mortalities, including all fishing.

[5] A Council Regulation (1100/2007) establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel was agreed in 2007. Since then, 15 years after its adoption, no notable recovery has been observed in the European eel population; this was confirmed by Special Request Advice on the national implementation published in 2022: <https://www.fishsec.org/2022/05/30/scientific-evaluation-no-overall-progress-on-eu-eel-recovery-targets/>. Another review of its implementation is underway and will be published in Spring 2025.

[6] Only **two EU countries – Ireland and Slovenia – have prohibited all fishing for the European eel**, despite the fact that it is also on the European Red List of Freshwater Fishes. **Six EU countries still landed over 100 tonnes in 2023**: the Netherlands (456 t), France (308 t), Germany [extrapolated from latest reported landings of >200 t], Poland (193 t), Sweden (174 t) and Denmark (125 t). Outside of the EU, Turkey, Tunisia and the United Kingdom also reported landings over 100 tonnes.

[7] **Trends in landings** – reported commercial landings of yellow and silver eel continue to fall overall. In 2022, landings were 2,366 tonnes and in 2023, landings were around 2,227 tonnes, if we assume that Germany landed >200 tonnes based on landings from recent years. However, the Netherlands and Poland stand out for **increasing reported commercial landings** since the EU eel regulation was adopted. Egypt, which has a substantial fishery for European eel and mainly targets yellow and silver eel, does not report any data to ICES and is not included in the overall estimates.

[8] **EU glass eel landings** – in 2023, reported commercial landings of glass eel, a fishery completely dominated by France, were at 54 tonnes. In France, landings have been increasing since 2010 and peaked at 53.4 tonnes last year. This year, France reported landings of 50.9 tonnes (prel. figures) – 93% of the EU catch. After Brexit, UK landings have fallen dramatically, from more than 3 tonnes to 1.4 tonnes in 2024. The Basque Country in Spain still allows a regulated recreational fishery for glass eel, with preliminary landings in 2023 of around 1,300 kg.

[9] **Recreational landings of yellow and silver eel are completely dominated by Germany and Denmark.** Total reported recreational landings for 2022 – the last year with complete figures – was 551 tonnes, of which 526 tonnes was reported in EU countries. **In Germany, recreational landings remain very high**, higher than reported commercial landings, with 275 tonnes reported for 2022. This is more than half of all reported recreational landings in the EU (52%). In Denmark, recreational landings (not angling) equalled commercial at 160 tonnes in 2022.

[10] **Restocking** involves catching wild glass eels in one place and letting them go in another, often spreading viruses and disease in the process. It has been used for decades in many countries – not as a conservation measure but in order to sustain fisheries for eel. Despite the prolonged practice, no net benefit to eel reproduction has been proven. In its advice for 2025, ICES notes that “restocking is reliant on a glass eel catch, which is in contradiction with the current advice”.

[11] Eels have a complex life cycle, going through several different life stages and generally live for 10–20 years. The very small, translucent eels arriving at European coastlines every year are called **glass eels**. When they reach brackish or fresh waters, they transform into less transparent **elvers**, and then grow into **yellow eels**, which live along our coasts, in rivers and lakes for up to 25 years. When mature, they transform again into **silver eels**, which will undertake the long journey to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.