

EAA position statement On the rebuilding of the European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) stock February 2023



European eel

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anguilla_anguilla.jpg

The EAA calls for:

1. **All anthropogenic impacts** (e.g., caused by hydropower, pumping stations, pollution etc.) that decrease the production and escapement of silver eels **should be reduced to – or kept as close to – zero as possible**. Eels must be prioritised, and the eel's natural habitat range must once again be made accessible via river restoration and installation of mitigation techniques.
2. **Stop all targeted fishing for eels**, commercial as well as recreational, at all its life stages, and compulsory release of all eel by-catches.
3. **Fishing for eels and elvers should only be allowed for research purposes** (e.g., tagging and monitoring).
4. **EAA does not accept** that profiteering by private hydropower companies should be put ahead of species conservation. EAA therefore calls for the regulation and sanction of the operation of hydropower plants rather than abandon natural eel habitats.
5. **Stop all sale of eels.**
6. Increased efforts with enforcement to restrict illegal fishing and the sale of eel in all its life stages.
7. **Increase research** to find the specific area in the Sargasso Sea that European eels breed, for that area to be protected.

****Minority statement by the Deutscher Angelfischerverband (DAFV) in the context of the 2023 EAA position paper on rebuilding of the European Eel stock:***

The German Angling Association DAFV supports the EAA calls no 4,6,7 that address non-fishery impacts on the stocks but rejects a total fishing ban. The DAFV is convinced that a well-controlled eel fishery along with restocking as recovery measure, and a responsible eel aquaculture sector, provides significant benefits to the eel stock recovery and its sustainable use. Prohibiting all eel fisheries will likely boost the very lucrative, illegal market, and consequently create much worse effects on the stock than a responsible and well-controlled market that is compliant with the EU Eel Regulation 1100/2007. Read the full DAFV position [here](#).

Justification:

1. EAA believes that the European eel is threatened by extinction.¹
2. The recruitment of elvers has declined dramatically throughout the 20th century. Alarmingly, elver numbers are now at only ca. 2 % of what they were in the 1960-70s.²
3. Elvers migrating from the Sargasso Sea are likely to be impacted for unknown reasons.
4. Elvers caught in European rivers used for restocking is less than it should be.
5. Elvers from European rivers are illegally exported to Asia in huge numbers.^{3,4,5}
6. However, while there is evidence that translocated and stocked eel can contribute to yellow and silver eel production in recipient waters, the evidence of contribution to actual spawning is missing due to the general lack of detailed knowledge of the spawning of eels.
7. In some areas, eels suffer from parasites *Anguillicola crassus* and/or pollution from hazardous substances (e.g., dioxins, PCBs, PFAS⁶), which weaken or kill them before or during their migration to the spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea.
8. The species is fished at all its life stages.
9. In Europe there are more than a million man-made obstacles⁷ – dams, weirs hydropower – which make it very difficult or impossible for eels and elvers to enter many rivers or to spread through river systems and lakes. Man-made obstacles in the rivers force eels to congregate in front of and behind the obstacles making them easy prey for cormorants and other predators.
10. Hydropower delays or prevents eels from up-stream and down-stream migration. In addition tens of thousands of eels are killed within hydropower turbines every year by the blades.



Eels killed within a hydropower turbine

<https://dafv.de/referate/aktuelles/item/178-tag-der-wanderfische>

The EAA stresses that:

- **Cutting from ICES' latest advice of 3 Nov 2022⁸:**
“ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches in all habitats in 2023. This applies to both recreational and commercial catches and includes catches of glass eels for restocking and aquaculture.”

For the first time ICES has included ecosystem considerations in its eel advice:

“ICES advises based on ecosystem based management considerations that:

- all non-fisheries related anthropogenic mortalities should be zero.
- the quantity and quality of eel habitats should be restored; this includes restoring connectivity and the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the habitats.”

- **ICES concluded** In a technical evaluation of the Member States' implementation of the Eel Regulation (November 2022)⁹ that no overall progress had been made by Member States and highlighted the need for more effort in addressing non-fisheries impacts.

- Eels are on the CITES list Appendix II since 2007¹⁰ and included Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).
- Much more needs to be done to improve the eel habitats, including removal of or altering obstacles in the eels' migration routes.
- **Freshwater habitats:** The European Eel Management Plan adopted in 2007¹¹, with regard to the freshwater habitats, has not delivered as hoped for.
- ICES finds that the 40% 'escape-to-open-sea' target in that Plan was set too low.

The 2023 eel management measures as agreed by the Council meeting, 11-12 Dec 2022¹² include:

- **Recreational fishing: banned all year** (marine, not freshwaters)
- **Commercial fishing: closure for any commercial eel fishing activity to six months** in marine and adjacent brackish waters in the north-east Atlantic (including the Baltic Sea) and in the Mediterranean (excluding the Black Sea) in a differentiated way to take into account different migration periods in different sea basins. Hence, member states will be able to adapt the closure period for different fishing areas, to take into account their specificities as well as the temporal and geographical migration patterns of eel at respectively the glass eel and silver eel life stage.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ It is classified as **critically endangered** by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN): www.iucnredlist.org/species/60344/152845178
And it appears on the **European Red List of Freshwater Fishes**:
https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/redlist/downloads/European_freshwater_fishes.pdf
- ² **ICES 7 Nov 2018**: “The annual recruitment of **glass eel** to European waters in 2018 is 2.1% of the 1960– 1979 level in the “North Sea” series and 10.1% in the “Elsewhere Europe” series.
The annual recruitment of **young yellow eel** to European waters in 2018 was 29% of the 1960–1979 level.”
<http://ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2018/2018/ele.2737.nea.pdf>

ICES 3 Nov 2022: “The status of European eel **remains critical**.
Indices of both glass and yellow eel recruitment **strongly declined from 1980 to 2011**.
Index values correspond to the recruitment as a percentage of the 1960–1979 geometric mean.
Glass eel recruitment in the “North Sea” index area was 0.5% in 2022 (provisional) and 0.6% in 2021 (final). In the “Elsewhere Europe” index series it was 9.7% in 2022 (provisional) and 5.5% in 2021 (final). **The yellow eel recruitment** index for 2021 was 19% (final) of the 1960–1979 geometric mean.
Time-series from 1980 to 2022 show that **glass eel recruitment remains at a very low level.**”
- ³ Stein FM, Frankowski J, Nijman V, Absil C, Kranendonk I, & Dekker W (2021). Chinese eel products in EU markets imply the effectiveness of trade regulations but expose fraudulent labelling. *Marine Policy*, 132, 104651.
doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104651
- ⁴ Nijman V, & Stein FM (2022). Meta-analyses of molecular seafood studies identify the global distribution of legal and illegal trade in CITES-regulated European eels. *Current Research in Food Science*, 5, 191-195.
doi.org/10.1016/j.crf.2022.01.009
- ⁵ Europol (2022). 49 individuals across Europe arrested in major blow to eels trafficking.
www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/49-individuals-across-europe-arrested-in-major-blow-to-eels-trafficking
- ⁶ **PFAS**, ‘per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances’; also ‘forever chemicals’: Ca. 12,000 different substances, which don’t break down naturally. Some forms of PFAS can take over 1,000 years to degrade. <https://echa.europa.eu/hot-topics/perfluoroalkyl-chemicals-pfas>
- ⁷ “...1.2 million barriers have fragmented European rivers for over a century in many cases (AMBER project).”
<https://damremoval.eu/report-2021>
- ⁸ https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/European_eel_Anguilla_anguilla_throughout_its_natural_range/19772374
- ⁹ https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/Request_for_technical_evaluation_of_the_Eel_Management_Plan_progress_reports/19902958
- ¹⁰ CITES: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
<https://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/cop17/eels.pdf>

About CITES **Appendix II** (trade ban or strict restriction): <https://cites.org/eng/disc/text.php#II>
- ¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32007R1100&from=EN>
- ¹² www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/13/council-approves-fishing-opportunities-for-2023-in-eu-and-non-eu-waters/