

Joint Declaration on strengthening the recovery for European eel

The Commission and Member States

Acknowledging that the stock of European eel is in critical condition, as confirmed again by ICES' latest advice of 7 November 2017;

Taking note of the listing of European eel in CITES Appendix II and in CMS Appendix II;

Recognizing that urgent action is needed to ensure the recovery of the stock across its natural range and that measures that further reduce eel mortality caused by human influences during all eel life stages need to be in place as from 2018;

Considering that a temporary closure of fisheries of eel of an overall length of 12 cm or longer in Union Waters of ICES areas including in the Baltic Sea has been agreed in the context of the Regulation for Fishing opportunities for 2018 and that the potential interaction with national eel management plans will have to be monitored;

Noting the need to work with third countries including through the Joint Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the recovery of the stock among all stakeholders;

Welcoming the GFCM decision to develop and implement a management plan for European eel in the Mediterranean together with non EU States and underlining that the EU has committed to table a proposal to that end at the 2018 GFCM Annual Session;

Understanding that the recovery of the stock requires measures in all natural eel habitats in the EU and during all stages of the eel life-cycle from the glass eel to the silver eel stage;

Supporting that the Commission will launch an external evaluation of the Eel Regulation early 2018 to assess its effectiveness and its contribution to the recovery of the stock of European eel, with a view to its possible revision, and will present the results of the evaluation and its conclusions to the Council in the first quarter of 2019;

Noting that the Commission will submit Member States' progress reports on the implementation of their national eel management plan due by 30 June 2018 to an external review to verify the accuracy and appropriateness of the data provided and the methods used to calculate them and thus ensure a level playing field;

Agree to strengthen the protection of the stock of European Eel

To this effect:

1. Member States will fully implement their national eel management plans and reinforce them as appropriate by further decreasing anthropogenic mortality factors during all stages of the eel lifecycle by a combination of measures such as reducing commercial fishing activity, restricting recreational fishing, putting in place structural measures to make rivers passable, improving river habitats, and transporting silver eels from inland waters to waters from which they can escape freely to the Sargasso Sea.
2. Where national eel management plans are not achieving their own targets in terms of fishing mortality and biomass escapement or where Member States do not provide sufficient data to calculate these fishing mortality and escapement targets, Member States concerned will apply as soon as possible to their internal eel fisheries measures with equivalent effect to those agreed in the fishing opportunities regulation.
3. Member States will review current restocking practices to ensure that publicly funded restocking contributes to increasing the escapement levels of silvers eels in line with the objectives of the Eel regulation.
4. Member States will improve the control of eel fisheries as appropriate and further increase their efforts with respect to fighting against illegal eel fishing and illegal trade of eels in particular of glass eels and ensure compliance with the CITES ban of extra-European trade. This may include the use of existing appropriate IT tools to ensure the traceability of eels at all life stages and to the final trade destination of the eels, both when they are used for human consumption directly or after rearing in aquaculture and when they are used for restocking, assisted migration or trap and transport purposes.

5. Member States will provide the progress reports foreseen under Article 9 of Regulation 1100/2007 on the implementation of their eel management plans by 30 June 2018
 6. Furthermore, Member States will inform about the measures they are taking to abide with their commitments under points 1-4 at the latest by 30 September 2018.
 7. Member States will, within the limits of their institutional set-up, endeavour to provide progress reports on the implementation of their eel management plans every three years, until there is a strong scientific evidence of recovery signs for the eel population across Europe.
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