



## Recovery of the European eel stock

Present in large numbers in most coastal and fresh water courses of Europe 30 years ago, European eels are today critically endangered.

### European eels

Growing in fresh water and reproducing at sea (a catadromous species), [European eels](#) *Anguilla anguilla* have a peculiar biology. Migrating thousands of kilometres, adult eels spawn (and die) in the depths of the Sargasso Sea (mid North Atlantic). After hatching, during larval stages, they cross the ocean to North-east Atlantic coasts (from Africa to Scandinavia, and into the Baltic and Black Seas). Changing into glass eels, they colonise fresh water courses upstream, where they stay and grow (elvers and yellow eels). After 10 to 20 years or so, adult fish start migrating downstream (silver eels) towards salt water and back to the Sargasso Sea. Numerous features of eel biology, notably on [migration](#) and [reproduction](#), are still unknown. Eels have not yet been successfully bred artificially.

### Stock status and main threats

The [European eel stock](#) has decreased by 95-99%, compared to its levels in 1960-80. Entry of juvenile eels to European waters has also fallen dramatically. The [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) classifies European eels as critically endangered. The species faces a number of threats (e.g. overfishing, environmental changes, parasites, and predators). Fishing for live glass eels remains particularly attractive in some areas, as they can fetch very high prices for further on-growing in fish farms or for restocking other rivers and lakes. Disappearance of wetlands and obstacles to upstream migration (dams) have significantly reduced eels' natural habitats, while power plants can lead to very high mortality, notably on migrating silver eels (e.g. turbines). Eels are also particularly prone to pollution and its impacts.

### EU measures

Council Regulation (EC) [No 1100/2007](#) sets out measures for the recovery of European eels,

centred on a general requirement for Member States (MS) to develop [eel management plans](#) (EMPs) by river basin. The objective of each EMP must be to permit the escape to the sea of at least 40% of the biomass of silver eels which would exist in the absence of any human impact. Various measures may be taken by MS (including facilitating migration or transporting silver eels to the sea), while some common rules are set regarding fishing activities (e.g. effort reduction at sea). If fishing for glass eels is allowed, part of the catch (60% since 2013) must be reserved for subsequent restocking to aim at higher escapement of silver eels. Such restocking is deemed a conservation measure eligible for financing by the [European Fisheries Fund](#).

However, the International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea (ICES), which has also been asked to assess EMPs, repeats in its advice for [2013](#) that "the status of eel remains critical and urgent action is needed" and that "all anthropogenic mortality affecting production and escapement of eels should be reduced to as close to zero as possible". Moreover, ICES [considers](#) that unconditional restocking of glass eels is not likely to contribute to recovery. The Commission also [recognises](#) that Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 has not yet been properly implemented

[In addition](#), international trade of European eels is severely restricted (by listing in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and in Annex B of Regulation (EC) No 338/97). No export or import of eels across EU external borders has been allowed in recent years.

### European Parliament

The EP is to vote on a Commission [proposal](#) aimed at aligning the 2007 eel recovery Regulation with the Lisbon Treaty (delegated and implementing acts). The report from the Committee on Fisheries (rapporteur: Isabella Lövin, Greens/EFA, Sweden) highlights the need to review the measures to save and allow recovery of the European eel stock.