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REPORT

on the development of a Community Action Plan for the recovery of European
eel
(2005/2032(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Albert Jan Maat

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**on the development of a Community Action Plan for the recovery of European eel
(2005/2032(INI))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 'Development of a Community Action Plan for the management of European eel' (COM(2003)0573),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A6-0284/2005),
1. Calls on the Commission to ask the Member States as soon as possible to draw up national management plans, which should comprise the following elements:
 - (a) technical measures to be taken where obstacles exist in waterways, in order to optimise the migration - i.e. upstream colonisation and downstream movement towards the sea - of eels;
 - (b) gathering of data on, monitoring of and, if appropriate, limits, where justified by historic and scientific data, on fishing effort by both professional and recreational fishermen by means of temporary bans on fishing and/or limits on catch capacity, with due regard for national differences in types of fishing and for credible self-regulation;
 - (c) increasing restocking with glass eels and fattened farmed eels in the managed areas in European inland waters;
 - (d) ensuring that eel farming is not so extensive as to disturb the viability of wild eel fisheries, either by depriving them of glass eels which naturally replenish stocks or by failing to ensure escapement of mature silver eels for natural spawning;
 - (e) measures relating to the management of cormorant populations to reduce eel mortality;
 2. Calls on the Commission to have research conducted into the role of climate change in the decline of eel stocks;
 3. Calls on the Commission to investigate any obstacles in the oceans to the natural migration of eels to the Sargasso Sea;
 4. Notes the ICES scientific reports on this subject;

5. Calls on the Commission to carry out research into the health of eels and the obstacles which such external factors as PCBs and fish diseases may present to successful migration and breeding;
6. Calls on the Commission to carry out research into the biogeographical distribution of stocks of this species of eel;
7. Calls on the Commission to carry out research into pollution as a factor in assessing possible causes of mortality among eel stocks in freshwater waterways;
8. Calls on the Commission to investigate the scope for supporting the process of change, inter alia by means of access to the European Fisheries Fund;
9. Calls on the Commission to adjust the policy on catches and exports of eel in such a way that enough glass eels are available for natural migration and enough glass eels are available at a reasonable price for restocking of natural eel habitats in accordance with sustainable fisheries management in Europe;
10. Calls on the Commission to propose measures to manage fishing and marketing and to monitor the quantities of glass eels offered for sale by means of a system of documentation of catches, in order to combat illegal fishing more effectively, this being responsible for a substantial reduction in young and adult eel stocks;
11. Calls on the Commission to make proposals to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of limits on catches and exports of glass eels;
12. Calls on the Commission, as soon as possible, to insert in the fisheries budget a separate entry for cofinancing of the restructuring of inland fisheries in Europe and to mitigate the impact of a change of policy in the glass eel sector;
13. Calls on the Commission, after the implementation of the Action Plan, to inform the European Parliament and Council annually about the progress made and the results achieved per Member State;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In recent years, eel stocks in the European Union have declined dramatically. There are grounds for fearing that, unless an Action Plan enters into force quickly in the European Union, the species could become extinct.

Throughout the distribution area of the European eel (the whole of Europe, and North Africa), eels are fished. Fishing of glass eels is concentrated in South-Western Europe: catches (c. 100 t) are used for direct consumption, allowed to mature into yellow eels (to some extent in Europe but especially in the Far East) or used for restocking of waters in the rest of Europe. Yellow eels and silver eels are fished everywhere in European waters; the catches (estimated at 8000 t), together with eels from aquaculture (c. 10 800 t), are used for consumption (smoked, steamed, in jelly, etc.).

Table 1 Overview of the principal countries where European eel is fished or farmed. The figures indicate official production in 2000. (Source: ICES/EIFAC Working Group on Eels). The official figures for fisheries substantially underestimate actual catches, which are thought to be around twice the amount shown.

Fishing in EU		Fishing outside EU		Eel farming	
Country	Production (t)	Country	Production (t)	Country	Production (t)
United Kingdom	796	Egypt	2 064	Netherlands	3 800
Germany	686	Norway	281	Denmark	2 674
Denmark	620	Turkey	176	Italy	2 750
Sweden	560	Tunisia	108	Elsewhere in Europe	1 639
Italy	549	Morocco	100	Asia	10 000
Poland	429	Elsewhere	238		
France	399				
Netherlands	351				
Ireland	250				
Elsewhere in EU	280				

In the past 20 years, stocks of eels above the minimum permitted size for fishing have declined by 50% (and over the past 40 years they have fallen by as much as 75%), while glass eel stocks have declined by 95% during the same period.

Since earliest times, there has been a strong demand for eel in Europe. In some areas it is a major feature of the culinary tradition and an essential element in the natural habitat.

Although inland fishing does not officially fall under the European common fisheries policy, the common problem which exists in numerous Member States necessitates a common approach. Without one, it is very likely that it will prove impossible to conserve or restore eel stocks.

Naturally, the differences between Member States and climate zones are great. In Scandinavia the situation is not like that in France, for instance. However, a substantial decline in eel stocks is observable throughout the European Union.

All waters in Europe where eel occurs may be contributing to the production of silver eels (fertile eels); closer to the sea more than further inland - in some countries more than in others. It is not clear whether silver eels from all countries actually participate in reproduction, or whether the spawning population comes from a small part of Europe, while silver eels from other countries die without reproducing.

It has been suggested that most female silver eels come from Scandinavia, but it also seems likely that the Gulf of Biscay, which is the initial arrival area for more than 95% of glass eels, is really the key area. If one were to protect one area and not another, it is quite possible that the protected area might turn out to be the wrong one. As a precaution, it must be assumed that all silver eels which migrate from Europe contribute to reproduction. Therefore no country can deny its shared responsibility for preserving breeding stocks.

Over the years, the proportion of eel consumed which is caught in the wild has declined substantially. The bulk of consumption is accounted for by aquaculture. Consequently, more and more of the glass eels which are caught are sold for use in aquaculture.

This trend has accelerated due to the enormous demand from South-East Asia for glass eels. As a result, glass eel prices have risen so high that it has become completely unviable, economically, to restock Europe's inland waters with glass eels.

As eel stocks have declined all over Europe, it currently seems most likely that all eels in Europe form part of a single stock and come from a single breeding area. Thus restoring eel stocks is primarily an international problem. At the same time, the eel is a species which typically occurs in small waters scattered all over Europe, in which small-scale fishing is practised and a huge number of local factors have an impact. It will only be possible to implement a recovery plan if it is carried out in all these small waters, with the cooperation of local interested parties and managers. The international recovery plan will have to be based on the information collected in all those small waters.

This twofold character of eel recovery (a large-scale problem occurring in small-scale waters) makes it necessary to divide roles between different tiers of government and between authorities and interested parties. On the one hand the central authority (EU) will have to set the conditions for sustainable management, and then impose them on lower tiers of government (the national level), which in turn can pass them on in the form of conditions for the fishing plans of regional fisheries managers. On the other hand, local management must be based on information concerning the local situation, and this information will have to be used by the (higher) authorities to monitor and evaluate the management measures implemented. Satisfactory cooperation between the fishing industry, other interested parties and the authorities is crucial here.

Action plan

On 1 October 2003, the Commission adopted its plans for the development of a Community Action Plan for the management of European eel¹. The fact is that, formally speaking, nothing more has happened since.

¹ COM(2003) 573.

A successful policy for European inland fisheries is possible only if a common objective is formulated and at the same time the Member States are given the opportunity to adopt appropriate measures by means of national management plans, taking account of the enormous differences between Member States as regards types of fishery and natural habitat. Subsidiarity is the key word here. However, the Commission should assess the effectiveness and feasibility of the national management plans.

It is because no action has been taken to adopt practical policy measures to implement the communication of 2003 that the Committee on Fisheries of the European Parliament has decided to adopt an own-initiative report.

PROCEDURE

Title	Development of a Community Action Plan for the recovery of European Eel		
Procedure number	2005/2032(INI)		
Basis in Rules of Procedure	Rule 45		
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	PECH 10.3.2005		
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary			
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision			
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary			
Motion(s) for resolution(s) included in report			
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Albert Jan Maat 2.2.2005		
Previous rapporteur(s)			
Discussed in committee	14.3.2005	25.4.2005	28.8.2005
Date adopted	4.10.2005		
Result of final vote	for: 22 against: 0 abstentions: 0		
Members present for the final vote	James Hugh Allister, Elspeth Attwooll, Marie-Hélène Aubert, Iles Braghetto, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, David Casa, Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Ioannis Gklavakis, Alfred Gomolka, Pedro Guerreiro, Ian Hudghton, Heinz Kindermann, Henrik Dam Kristensen, Albert Jan Maat, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, Philippe Morillon, Seán Ó Neachtain, Willi Piecyk, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre		
Substitutes present for the final vote	Duarte Freitas		
Substitutes under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote			
Date tabled – A6	6.10.2005	A6-0284/2005	