Recovery of the stock of European eel

2005/0201(CNS) - 21/10/2014 - Follow-up document

The Commission presented, in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) 1100/2007, a report on the outcome of the implementation of the Eel Management Plans, including an evaluation of the measures concerning restocking and of the evolution of market prices for eels less than 12 cm in length.

The report made the following recommendations:

State of the Stock of European Eel: according to the latest ICES advice released in November 2013, the status of the eel stock remains **critical and urgent action is needed**. The advice points out that there is an increase in the annual recruitment of glass eels from less than 1% to 1,5% in the North Sea and from 5% to 10% elsewhere over the last two years.

Scientific advice is also provided by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature which has assessed in 2014 the species as critically endangered on the basis of a sharp reduction in population size.

State of Implementation of Regulation 1100/2007: the implementation of the Eel Regulation has suffered significant delays. Nineteen Member States have submitted EMPs. These plans contain various measures to reduce mortality factors including fishing restrictions and non-fishing related actions, in particular as regards the modification or removal of migration obstacles, restocking, reduction of pollution, combating of parasites. Before approval by the Commission, all EMPs submitted were examined by ICES.

Despite the implementation of EMPs, the state of the stock of European eel remains critical and a **precautionary approach** should be adopted until there is certain evidence of a sustained increase in recruitment and the adult stock. In line with this scientific advice, **additional measures** may need to be considered to reduce current levels of humanly induced mortality (fisheries and non-fishing anthropogenic mortality).

The Commission recommended that **more attention should be given to management measures** related to these non-fishing anthropogenic mortality factors – in particular, hydropower and pumping stations, habitat loss or degradation, pollution, diseases and parasites - the majority of which has only partially been implemented by Member States.

Moreover, the implementation of EMPs has resulted in restrictions on fisheries, which can bring about an increase in glass eel recruitment within a couple of years. It is therefore necessary to **assess the impact of such restrictions** in the short-term.

Lastly, it is recalled that the EMPs should contain management measures to ensure the escapement to the sea of at least 40% of adult eels relative to the escapement levels that would have existed in the absence of human influences. However, there is **not yet the complete data available from inside or outside the EU** to assess the achievement of this objective at the scale of the EU or the whole eel stock.

Restocking: the Eel Regulation obliges Member States who permit glass eels fishing to reserve at least 60% of the catches for conservation-oriented restocking within the EU. However, it is not certain that 60% of the total catches have been effectively restocked, since it seems that the demand is not sufficient.

Scientific advice on the state of the stock of European eel for 2012 **expressed concerns about current eel restocking practices** and pointed out that it is not clear if restocking actually contributes to ensure increased silver eel escapement, or to sustain fishing for eel in certain EMUs.

The reported stressed that it is therefore necessary to put in place means to evaluate the effects of this measure and contribution to silver eel escapement, as well as consider if the provisions on restocking in the Eel Regulation are still adequate in light of problems with their implementation.

The services of the Commission are closely following scientific work on this topic and will address the issue in accordance with most recent findings.

Reporting obligations: from an administrative point of view, the Eel regulation puts upon Member States significant reporting obligations, since a complete reporting of indicators is necessary to fully assess the state of the stock and the effectiveness of the implementation of EMPs. However, reporting has often been incomplete, whereas there are inconsistencies in reporting and calculation of reported stock indicators among Member States.

Standardization of data table formats and calculation methods would facilitate reporting, while enabling a better evaluation of the effectiveness of individual management measures at EMU level.

The Commission intends to request an **external scientific review of the methodologies used by Member States**, and, where relevant, an update or a new estimation of stock indicators regarding eel. On the basis of this advice and where appropriate, the Commission will consider ways and means to assess the effectiveness of the Eel regulation, including a possible review.