Recovery of the stock of European eel

2005/0201(CNS) - 06/10/2005 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: To establish measures for the recovery of European Eel stock.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation

CONTENT: Recent scientific research, conducted by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), indicates that the European eel fish stock is so depleted that it is now outside safe biological limits. This, in spite of a number of measures taken by the Member States to protect eel's natural habitat (minimum landing sizes, licensing of eel fishermen, regulating the construction of dam and eel passes, the EU Habitat Directive etc.) The Commission has thus come to the conclusion that the very nature of eel migration and feeding habits makes it impossible to manage eel populations by relying exclusively on standard management instruments.

In presenting this Regulation the Commission is hoping to achieve a recovery of eel stock across Europe to previous levels of adult abundance as well as seeing a return of the glass eel. It intends to do so by setting a specific target for managing Europe's eel population. The main part of the Regulation therefore is cast as an obligation whereby Member States are expected to achieve a specified target for eel management. The choice of management to be used can be determined by the Member States with the Commission establishing the target to be met. The choice of a devolved approach based principally on eel management plans devised by Member States, but whose objective is determined in Community legislation is, according to the Commission, an appropriate methodology for the restoration of Europe's declining eel stock. By managing the eel population thus, the Commission believes it is contributing to an equitable and balanced system of management, which in the long term, will help protect Europe's depleted eel population. This approach has the support of interested parties, all of whom were consulted in a transparent and open manner prior to the presentation of this Regulation. The actual provisions being proposed are as follows:

- Eel management plans: The principle element of the Regulation is the establishment of national eel management plans whereby each Member State will achieve the objective of a 40% escapement of adult silver eel from each river basin (measured with respect to undisturbed conditions). These plans should be reviewed by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries and, if a positive evaluation is received, should be approved by the Commission and come into force on 1 July 2007.

- Given the gravity of eel decline the Commission is also proposing additional short-term measures, namely imposing fishery closures for 15 days each month. These closures should stay in force until a Member State has implemented an approved Eel Management Plan.

- The above measure could be over-ruled in cases where a Member State can reliable demonstrate that existing measures are in conformity with the 40% objective or if the fishing is for glass eel to be used for restocking purposes.

In addition to these measures, the Commission will be proposing the establishment of a traceability system to assist in the fight against poaching. Within this context the Commission proposes that provisions concerning the control and enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy should also apply to eel fisheries and to eel products. Other measures include examining ways in which to limit the export of glass eel

As far as budgetary implications are concerned, the Regulation will have a negligible impact on the Community budget. Research into eel populations will be funded through the 7th Framework Programme. State aid applicable to fisheries and its applicability to eel fisheries and environmental measures are addressed in the European Fisheries Fund.