

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 3-8 February 2025

Species conservation and trade

Fauna

Aquatic species

Eels (*Anguilla* spp.)

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted [Decisions 19.218 to 19.221](#) on *Eels* (*Anguilla* spp.). The implementation of Decisions 19.219 and 19.221 is reported in the present document:

***Directed to the Secretariat***

**19.219** *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *issue a Notification inviting range States of European eels (*Anguilla anguilla*), transit and importing Parties to submit to the Secretariat information on the implementation of Decision 19.218, any information sought in Notification No. 2021/018 not already provided or any updates to the information previously submitted in response to Notification to the Parties No. 2021/018 on eels, especially information on current levels of, or emerging trends in, trade in specimens of *Anguilla* spp.;*
- b) *prepare and submit a summary of the responses to Notification to the Parties No. 2021/018 on eels, including any updates provided under Decision 19.218, with draft recommendations on the conservation and management of European eels to the Animals Committee and draft recommendations to improve implementation of the Convention for European eels to the Standing Committee, for their consideration; and*
- c) *submit the study prepared in the implementation of Decision 18.199, paragraph d), on levels of trade and trade patterns, especially in live eels for aquaculture, and sources of supply, identify any disparities between these, and draft recommendations for the more effective future management of harvests and trade for consideration by the Animals Committee and Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

***Directed to the Standing Committee***

**19.221** *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *consider the report prepared by the Secretariat and any other available information relating to illegal trade in European eel and make recommendations as appropriate;*

- b) review any advice and recommendations from the Animals Committee concerning Decision 19.220 and make recommendations to improve the implementation of the Convention for European eel and the applicability of developing a specific Resolution to the Parties or the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate;
- c) with the assistance of the Secretariat, engage with the World Customs Organization to examine the feasibility of harmonizing customs codes relevant to trade in all *Anguilla* species; and
- d) report on the implementation of this decision to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

#### Implementation of Decision 19.219

3. The Secretariat reported to the 32nd meeting of the Animals Committee (AC32; Geneva, June 2023) that, pursuant to paragraph a) of Decision 19.219, it had issued [Notification to the Parties No. 2023/062](#) on 18 May 2023 inviting range States of European eels (*Anguilla anguilla*), transit and importing Parties to submit information, especially information on current levels of, or emerging trends in, trade in specimens of *Anguilla* spp. The Notification also invited Parties to submit information on the implementation of Decision 19.218, specifically with regards to sharing protocols and guidelines for the reintroduction of seized live European eels to the wild.
4. In implementation of paragraph b) of Decision 19.219, the Secretariat submitted to the Animals Committee at its 33rd meeting (AC33, Geneva, July 2024) a consolidated summary of the responses received to Notification to the Parties No. 2021/018 and Notification to the Parties No. 2023/062, including any updates provided under Decision 19.218 on *Eels* (*Anguilla* spp.). This summary is presented in the Annex to document [AC33 Doc. 40](#). The Secretariat also provided this information to the intersessional working groups of the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee for their consideration.
5. At AC33, the Animals Committee requested that China, Cuba, Egypt and Türkiye submit detailed information on trade in eels for consideration at the 78th meeting of the Standing Committee, and invited the Standing Committee to propose a specific draft decision directed to those Parties that do not respond, seeking this information (see summary record [AC33 SR](#)). On 21 October 2024, China provided a response which was shared with the Standing Committee's intersessional working group on eels for its consideration. The report of the working group is presented in document [SC78 Doc.69.1](#)
6. Pursuant to paragraph c) of Decision 19.219, the Secretariat included the study in its report to AC32 ([AC32 Doc. 36 – Annex](#)), reflected on the outcomes of the previous intersessional period and presented recommendations for the more effective future management of harvest of and trade in eels for consideration by the Animals Committee.

#### Implementation of Decision 19.221, paragraph a)

7. To support the consideration of the Standing Committee concerning paragraph a) of Decision 19.221, the Secretariat provides an update on illegal trade in European eels in the following paragraphs.

#### *Analysis of the data on seizures of A. anguilla*

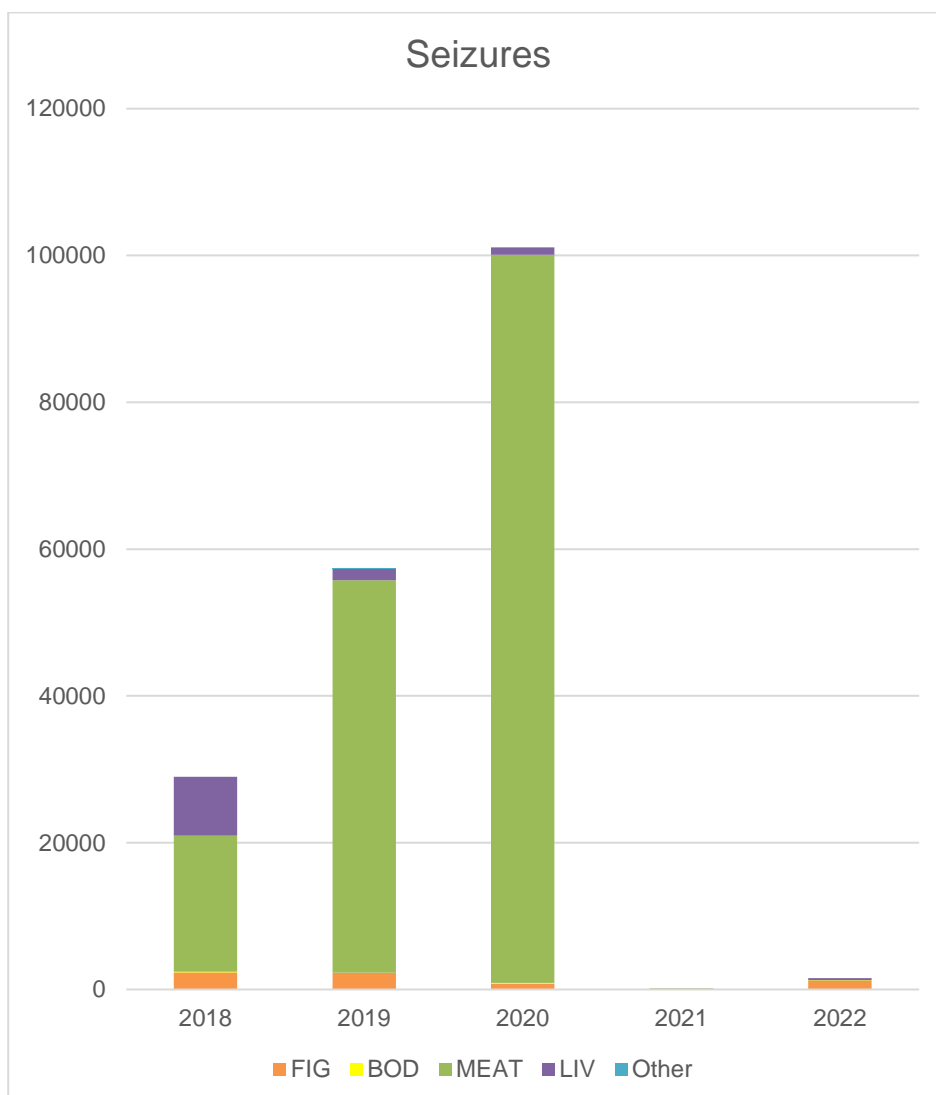
8. The Secretariat conducted an analysis of data on European eel seizures from 2018 to 2022, as reported by Parties in their annual illegal trade reports. This data, extracted in November 2024 are summarised in the table below<sup>1</sup>. The information concerning seizures made in 2023 was not included in the table, as the data was still under processing after the submission deadline of 31 October 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures are presented without a thousand separator and the use of a point as a decimal separator, as per the Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report.

Year	Number of Parties reporting seizures	Total number of seizure records reported	Quantity seized (where reported as kg)	Quantity seized (where reported as number)
2018	13 Parties	140	28955.71	163
2019	15 Parties	75	57341.6	386132
2020	10 Parties	53	101106.87	11
2021	8 Parties	22	133.58	148
2022	10 Parties	57	1549.56	11
TOTAL		347	189087.32	386465

9. While it is difficult to draw clear conclusions from this data, primarily due to the mixed units used in reporting (kg vs number of specimens), reporting accuracy for the annual illegal trade reports continues to improve, with Parties increasingly reporting the life stage for fingerlings (FIG) and recording seizures by weight rather than number of specimens, as recommended in sections 3 and 4 of the [Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report](#).
10. Closer examination of the 2018-2022 data indicates that, during this five-year period, a total of 347 records of seizures of European eels were submitted by a total of 23 Parties, accounting for a total of at least 189,087 kg (189 tonnes) of European eels. These figures are known to be underestimates, since it excludes the quantities that have been reported as number of specimens. Between 2018 and 2020, the quantity seized increased year on year, with a significant drop in the quantity seized in 2021 and 2022.
11. The total volume of specimens recorded as seizures in kg over this five-year period (2018 to 2022) is illustrated in the graph below, broken down into different specimen types, including fingerlings (FIG), bodies (BOD), meat (MEA), live (LIV) and other.



12. The breakdown of specimens seized, as reported in the annual illegal trade reports submitted by Parties, where recorded as kg, is also presented in the following table.

Year	Specimens (where recorded as kg)					Total
	FIG	BOD	MEAT	LIV	Other	
2018	2340.47	64.92	18550	8000.32	0	28955.71
2019	2303.68	0	53455.95	1581.97	6.854	57348.454
2020	817.72	94.4	99206.7	988.05	0	101106.87
2021	66.61	12.6	27.35	27.03	0	133.59
2022	1239.46	4	31.8	274.3	0	1549.56

13. Seizures of glass eels or fingerlings (FIG) started high in 2018 (2340.47 kg) and declined sharply by 2021 (66.61 kg). A slight increase occurred in 2022 (1239.46 kg). Reports of live (LIV) seizures started at 8,000.32 kg in 2018; saw a significant decline by 2020 (988.05 kg); and continued to drop until a small increase in 2022 (274.3 kg). It is possible that some of the seizures reported as LIV in 2018 could have been live glass eels. This is supported by the fact that the number of seizures was very high in 2018 (140), suggesting a high number of small seizures. Meat (MEA) and bodies (BOD) experienced a sharp combined increase from 2018 to a peak in 2020, followed by a dramatic decline in 2021 and remaining low in 2022. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions from this data without knowing the enforcement effort and noting that the COVID-19 global pandemic may have had an impact on levels of illegal trade and the number of seizures. It will be important to monitor this to see if this decline was an outlier due to the pandemic and the resultant closure of borders.

*Additional information on illegal trade in A. anguilla*

14. The Secretariat notes that the European eel has continued to receive significant attention from national and international enforcement agencies since its inclusion in CITES Appendix II in 2009. Details of the actions taken by national CITES authorities and enforcement agencies have been reported to the Standing Committee in several previous documents, including documents [SC69 Doc. 47.1](#) and [Doc. 47.2](#); [SC70 Doc. 45](#); [SC74 Doc. 64.1](#), [SC75 Doc. 12](#) and [SC77 Doc. 66](#). The results of continued special operations such as Operation Thunder, Operation LAKE, Operation Fame and Operation Vitrum demonstrate the value of such targeted activities.
15. Europol annually leads Operation LAKE, which has made significant efforts to curb eel trafficking. Based on information released by Europol on 3 October 2024<sup>2</sup>, a multinational operation involving 30 countries worldwide supported by Europol revealed two new smuggling routes for glass eels through Sub-Saharan Africa. Previously, European glass eels had primarily been harvested illegally in France, Spain, and Portugal, then shipped to Asia. Europol indicates that traffickers are now using Mauritania and Senegal as transit points. According to Europol, recent enforcement efforts have resulted in the seizure of five tonnes of trafficked eels. To date, the operations have led to 850 arrests and the seizure of over 87 tonnes of glass eels and elvers.
16. At SC77, the Secretary-General presented the CITES Certificate of Commendation to Europol in recognition of exemplary interagency coordination and operational activities undertaken during the latest edition of Operation LAKE<sup>3</sup>.
17. The Secretariat continues to collaborate closely with its partners in the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC). Undertakings such as the Thunder series of global law enforcement operations to address wildlife crime, led by INTERPOL and the WCO, make an important contribution to the fight against illegal trade in European eels.
18. [Operation Thunder 2023](#), in October 2023, brought together police, customs, financial intelligence units, wildlife and forestry enforcement agencies from 133 Parties (the largest number of Parties to take part in a Thunder operation since the series started in 2017). Parties that participated in Operation Thunder 2023

<sup>2</sup> [5 tonnes of trafficked glass eels seized and new smuggling routes identified in global operation | Europol](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://cites.org/eng/news/cites-sg-certificate-of-commendation-awarded-to-europol>

reported the seizure of 20,034 kg and 40,431 pieces of marine products, including eels, corals and sea cucumbers.

19. Ongoing international cooperation remains crucial to safeguard the future of the European eel. Parties are therefore encouraged to continue their active engagement in operations and targeted activities aimed at addressing wildlife crime, including illegal eel trade, as recommended in paragraph 14 d) of Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on *Compliance and enforcement*.

#### Implementation of Decision 19.221, paragraph b)

20. Concerning paragraph b) of Decision 19.221, the Secretariat collated and summarized all of the responses to the two notifications on eels ([Notification to the Parties No. 2021/018](#) and [No. 2023/062](#)). On the basis of these responses, the Secretariat prepared draft recommendations on improving the implementation of the Convention for European eels that was shared with the Animals Committee's intersessional working group on eels and its recommendations were shared with the Standing Committee's intersessional working group on eels. China also provided additional information that was shared with the working group of the Standing Committee, whose report is presented in document [SC78 Doc. 69.1](#).

#### Implementation of Decision 19.221, paragraph c)

21. Concerning paragraph c) of Decision 19.221, the Secretariat has reached out to the World Customs Organization (WCO) to examine the feasibility of harmonizing customs codes relevant to trade in all *Anguilla* species. At the time of writing, no response had been received. The Secretariat has tried unsuccessfully to implement this part of the Decision and would appreciate the Standing Committee's advice on how best to proceed. In the absence of any progress, the Secretariat proposes to delete this part of the decision.

#### Recommendations

22. The Standing Committee is invited to:
  - a) note the updates in this document and encourage Parties affected by illegal trade in eels to actively engage in any operations and targeted activities aimed at addressing this issue; and
  - b) agree that Decisions 19.218 to 19.221 can be deleted.