

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



Twenty-ninth meeting of the Animals Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 18-22 July 2017

SUMMARY OF MAINE SYMPOSIUM ON CONSERVATION OF THE AMERICAN EEL,  
OCTOBER 23-25, 2015

This document has been submitted by the United States of America at the request of the Sargasso Sea Commission in relation to agenda item 21\*.

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## SUMMARY OF MAINE SYMPOSIUM ON CONSERVATION OF THE AMERICAN EEL

23-25 OCTOBER 2015

**Sponsored by the Sargasso Sea Commission, the Marine & Environmental Law Institute of Dalhousie University, Ocean Tracking Network, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Center for Oceans and Coastal Law at the University of Maine School of Law and the Ocean and Coastal Law Journal**

For link to complete set of presentations, agenda and photographs for the symposium: <http://www.sargassoseacommission.org/about-our-work/workshops/american-eel-workshop>

For full transcription of the proceedings see Ocean and Coastal Law Journal, Vol. 21 (2016): <http://oclj.maine.law.maine.edu/volume-21-no-1-2-2016/>

From 23-25 October 2015, the Sargasso Sea Commission -- together with the Marine & Environmental Law Institute of Dalhousie University, Ocean Tracking Network, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Center for Oceans and Coastal Law at the University of Maine School of Law, Ocean and Coastal Law Journal, and the Gulf of Maine Research Institute -- sponsored an interactive symposium in Portland Maine on conservation of the American eel. Over 30 eel experts and stakeholders from government, academia, commercial and conservation interests spent the weekend reviewing key scientific, policy and cultural issues surrounding the American eel, a species that is known to be depleted and whose complex life cycle and vast range and migrations are one of the most mysterious on Earth. The Ocean and Coastal Law Journal at Maine Law School published a verbatim transcription of the symposium.

The American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) is a catadromous species which lives most of its life in fresh and brackish water habitats throughout western and central North America, the Caribbean and the very north of South America. The mature eels then migrate thousands of miles to the Sargasso Sea, south of Bermuda, where they spawn and die; the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is also known to spawn here. One of the workshop participants, Dr. Martin Castonguay, just released an important paper with a team of scientists that tracked for the first time an adult American eel from the coast of Canada 2,400 km to its spawning area in the Sargasso Sea. Although the spawning has never been witnessed, it is known that the young leptocephali find their way back to the Americas to begin the cycle again.

There is significant concern about the conservation status of both the European and American eel, both of which are classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species - the European eel listed as critically endangered. This status is--due to a suite of impacting factors that have resulted in a decline in recruitment and escapement for migration to the Sargasso Sea

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over the past four decades. The American eel is a candidate for protection under species at risk legislation in both the US and Canada.

Participants sent by the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, the Maliseet Nation Conservation Council, and Chief Moore of the Passamaquoddy Tribe joined with representatives of the Governments of Canada and the US, and participants from commercial eel and elver fisheries as well as hydropower firms explored the interactions between indigenous approaches, commercial interests and local, state, regional and national regulation. Representatives from Fisheries and Oceans Canada sat at the table with experts from the Maine Department of Marine Resources US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council discussing how eel conservation is approached respectively in Canada and the US.

The participation of experts from the Sargasso Sea Commission, the Convention on Migratory Species Secretariat, the London Zoological Society and UK Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) facilitated comparisons with the ways in which the conservation of the European and Japanese eel is being addressed. Participants noted one of the unique significance of this gathering was its pioneering informal, multilateral stakeholder approach – a process that has achieved results for other species and locations but has not yet been applied to address American eel conservation. The workshop participants encouraged continuing and expanding the process to include Caribbean stakeholders as well.

The workshop represented a concrete effort to build both informal networks and towards a more formal larger framework on multilateral cooperation in eel conservation. Dr. Bradnee Chambers, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) encouraged the participants to look at possible opportunities to use mechanisms under the CMS for American eel conservation efforts. The cooperative and constructive approach of the symposium participants created an enthusiasm for additional collaboration. It became clear that efforts to better understand the situation of the American eels in the Caribbean are sorely needed and that current structures also leave room for fuller incorporation of First Nation perspectives and improved stakeholder coordination and communication.