

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



Sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November - 1 December 2017

Species specific matters

Eels (*Anguilla* spp.)

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted the interrelated Decisions 17.186 to 17.189 on *Eels* (*Anguilla* spp.) as follows:

***Directed to the Secretariat***

17.186 *The Secretariat shall, subject to external funding:*

- a) *contract independent consultants to undertake a study compiling information on challenges and lessons learnt with regards to implementation of the Appendix II listing of European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and its effectiveness. This includes in particular the making of non-detriment findings, enforcement and identification challenges, as well as illegal trade. This study should notably take account of the data compiled and advice issued by the ICES/GFCM/EIFAAC Working Group on Eel;*
- b) *contract independent consultants to undertake a study on non-CITES listed *Anguilla* species:*
  - i) *documenting trade levels and possible changes in trade patterns following the entry into force of the listing of the European Eel in CITES Appendix II in 2009;*
  - ii) *compiling available data and information on the biology, population status, use and trade in each species, as well as identifying gaps in such data and information, based on the latest available data and taking account inter alia of the Red List assessments by the IUCN Anguillid Eel Specialist Group; and*
  - iii) *providing recommendations for priority topics for technical workshops based on gaps and challenges identified under i)-ii);*
- c) *make the reports from the studies above available to the 29th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC29) for their consideration; and*
- d) *organize, where appropriate, international technical workshops, inviting cooperation with and participation by the relevant range States, trading countries, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the IUCN Anguillid Eel Specialist Group, the ICES/GFCM/EIFAAC Working Group Eel, industry and other experts appointed by Parties as appropriate. Such workshops should in particular cover the topics identified by the reports described in subparagraphs a) and b) of this Decision and could focus on challenges specific to the various eel species, such as*

- i) *in relation to European eel, the realization of and guidance available for non-detriment findings, as well as enforcement of the Appendix II listing including identification challenges; and*
- ii) *in relation to the other eel species, to enable a better understanding of the effects of international trade, including trade in their various life stages, and possible measures to ensure sustainable trade in such species;*
- e) *make any workshop report available to the 30th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC30) for their consideration; and*
- f) *make available to the Standing Committee relevant information on illegal trade in European eels gathered from the study and the workshop report mentioned in paragraphs a) and e).*

**Directed to range States and Parties involved in trade in *Anguilla* spp.**

17.187 *Range States and Parties involved in trade in *Anguilla* species, in collaboration with the Secretariat and FAO, are encouraged to:*

- a) *promote international or regional cooperation on a species-by-species basis, including the convening of regional meetings to discuss how to fill the information gaps and ensure long-term sustainability in the face of increasing demand from international trade;*
- b) *provide the Secretariat and their consultants with specific information needed for the purposes of completing Decision 17.186 a) and b) as well as the results of the regional meetings; and*
- c) *participate, where appropriate, in the technical workshops and share expertise and knowledge on the priority topics identified [examples provided under in Decision 17.186 paragraph d)].*

**Directed to the Animals Committee**

17.188 *The Animals Committee shall:*

- a) *consider, at its 29th and 30th meetings, the reports produced under Decision 17.186, as well as the information submitted by European Eel range States and other eel range States pursuant to Decision 17.187, and any other relevant information on conservation of and trade in *Anguilla* species; and*
- b) *provide recommendations to ensure the sustainable trade in *Anguilla* species, to Parties for consideration at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

**Directed to the Standing Committee**

17.189 *The Standing Committee shall consider information relating to illegal trade in European eel at its 69th and 70th meetings and adopt recommendations as appropriate.*

Progress on implementation of Decisions 17.186 and 17.188

3. The Secretariat reported to the 29th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC29, Geneva, July 2017) that it had not been able to implement Decision 17.186 within the timeframe envisaged because the necessary external funding could not be secured in time. The European Union (EU) has in the meantime confirmed its financial support for implementing this Decision as part of a project entitled “Implementation of CITES CoP17 Resolutions and Decisions”, for which the Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude.
4. During the discussions at AC29, several participants encouraged the Secretariat to make sure that all Parties were well informed about planned workshops, and encouraged good participation from eel range States. Japan drew the attention of the Committee to information document [AC29 Inf. 13](#), which contained a joint press release on the occasion of the tenth meeting of the informal consultation on international cooperation for conservation and management of Japanese eel stock and other relevant eel species. A number of Parties

expressed their willingness to cooperate with work done on eels, by offering technical assistance or coordinating with regional eel range States to produce the study on non-CITES listed eel species. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) updated the Committee on a new programme on tropical eel species in Southeast Asia aimed at collecting fundamental data, strengthening resource management and improving the survival rate of tropical eels. It was noted that European eels are listed on Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and suggested that there is potential scope for collaboration between the two Secretariats. Concerns were raised about shifting trade pressures to other species of eels, as well as identification issues and the problem of look-alike species.

5. In order to make progress on the issue before the next meeting of the Animals Committee in 2018, the Committee established an intersessional working group on eels that will work by electronic means between the 29th and 30th meetings of the Animals Committee, with the following tasks:
  - a) to review the studies produced by the Secretariat under Decision 17.186 paragraphs a) and b), as and when they become available, and any other relevant information;
  - b) to consider the outcome of any technical workshops organised in relation to Decision 17.186 paragraph d) and e) and to provide any provisional recommendations and views that could be reflected in the workshops; and
  - c) to report to the 30th meeting of the Animals Committee with its provisional recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

The working group will be chaired by Mr. Vincent Fleming (AC representative for Europe) and draws members from 16 Parties, as well as a range of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, including a number of fisheries agencies and associations.

6. At the time of writing (September 2017), the consultants had not yet been appointed, but it is envisaged that they will be in place soon, and that work on the two studies will be underway by SC69. The first study will compile information on the implementation of the Appendix II listing of *Anguilla anguilla*, including the making of non-detriment findings, enforcement and identification challenges, and illegal trade. The second study will document use, trade levels and trade patterns, biology and population status, as well as information gaps, concerning non-CITES listed *Anguilla* species.

#### Progress on implementation of Decision 17.187

7. The annual meeting of the joint EIFAC/ICES/GFCM<sup>1</sup> working group on eels (WGEEL) to conduct an assessment of the stock and factors affecting the stock of European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) will take place from 3 to 10 October 2017 in Kavala, Greece. A number of regional meetings are also planned to discuss other Anguillid species, including *A. rostrata*, *A. japonica* and some tropical Anguillid species, but at the time of writing (September 2017), the details and dates of these meetings had not been confirmed. Where possible, the consultants will attend these regional meetings and that the outcomes of these meetings will be incorporated into the reports referred to in Decision 17.186 paragraphs a) and b).

#### Progress on implementation of Decision 17.189

8. Concerning Decision 17.189, the Secretariat had envisaged that the Standing Committee would examine, at its 69th meeting (SC69), information on the illegal trade in European eels resulting from the implementation of subparagraph f) of Decision 17.186. However, as outlined in paragraphs 3 to 5 above, the information from the studies will not be available for consideration until the 70th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC70).
9. According to a report compiled by TRAFFIC in July 2017<sup>2</sup>, important trends in illegal trade that are noticeable in 2016 in comparison to 2015 include the continued illegal export of European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) destined for Asia, specifically to China and Hong Kong SAR. In this regard, the Secretariat would like to draw

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<sup>1</sup> EIFAC = European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission; ICES = International Council for the Exploration of the Seas; GFCM = General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean.

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/reports/2016\\_overview\\_significant\\_seizures.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/reports/2016_overview_significant_seizures.pdf)

the Standing Committee's attention to a number of recent enforcement operations that have led to significant seizures of European eels.

10. In 2015, the European Police Office (Europol) initiated Operation LAKE<sup>3</sup> in collaboration with several law enforcement agencies from France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as Eurojust. Operation LAKE is the most important European initiative aimed at combating trafficking in endangered species in the EU, having emerged within the framework of the European Union Action Plan against wildlife trafficking.
11. In 2016, Spain reported seven seizures involving approximately 234 kg of live European eels at Madrid Airport. Specimens were smuggled in plastic bags and transported in suitcases. In one case (February 2016), circa 36 kg of live specimens were destined to China, using France as a transit route. Two other seizures (February-March 2016) of a total of 86 kg of live specimens were destined to China, using the Netherlands as a transit route. In another case (March 2016), 40 kg of live specimens were destined to Hong Kong. Seizures of European eels continue to occur also within EU member States, in addition to across borders, particularly in France and Spain. As an example, in 2016, France reported four internal seizures involving a total of 190 kg of live specimens.
12. The activities carried out under Operation LAKE during the 2016 to 2017 fishing season have led to the arrest of 48 people and the seizure of 4,000 kg of glass eels, totaling approximately EUR 4 million. Investigations proved that more than 10 tonnes (10,000 kg) of glass eels had been smuggled from the EU to China, with an estimated value of EUR 10 million. One of the organizations investigated is believed to have earned approximately EUR 280 million in the last five years. Raids in Greece and Spain led to 32 individuals being arrested and two tonnes (2,000 kg) of eels worth EUR 2 million being seized. Spanish investigators also discovered a company that had been delivering specimens to Greece with false documentation with the intent of illegally exporting them to Asia. In February 2017, 48 kg of live eels contained in 72 plastic bags were seized at Madrid Airport. The shipment, transported by Chinese nationals, was destined to Hong Kong SAR where its estimated value would amount to EUR 96,000. The seized specimens were transported to an aquaculture facility to be reared and subsequently reintroduced into the wild. Seven people suspected of glass eel trafficking were arrested in Portugal and 120 kg of glass eels were seized at Lisbon airport. In March 2017, UK border Force officials apprehended a 64-year-old man at Heathrow Airport in March 2017, who was attempting to export a crate containing chilled fish legitimately bound for Hong Kong SAR, underneath which officials found 600,000 glass eels with a street value of GBP 1.2 million.

#### Recommendations

13. The Standing Committee is invited to:
  - a) note the information in paragraphs 3 to 6 concerning the ongoing work on eels being carried out by the Animals Committee with regards to the implementation of Decisions 17.186 and 17.188, and the information on illegal trade in European eel outlined in paragraphs 9 to 12; and
  - b) agree to review the information on illegal trade in eels provided under paragraph f) of Decision 17.186 and make recommendations as appropriate at SC70.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/eu-law-enforcement-step-efforts-to-protect-environment-%E2%80%93-48-arrested-for-trafficking-endangered-species>