

# The European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC): Its role in reconciling fisheries with conservation in times of change in Europe

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## Who – or what – is EIFAC?

The European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission EIFAC is a statutory body of the Food and Agriculture Organization FAO of the United Nations. It is a regional fisheries commission of FAO, serving as the centre of a network, linking policy-makers, managers, scientists and others working on inland fisheries and aquaculture issues.

EIFAC has served since 1957 as the only international forum for collaboration and information exchange among all European countries and for advice to member Governments on the management of inland fisheries and aquaculture. It currently has 34 members (white on map). The Commission has produced numerous publications on topics within its competence, in addition to its Reports, Technical and Occasional Papers.



<http://www.fao.org/fi/body/eifac/eifac.asp>

## How does EIFAC work?

Work is organized in four sub-commissions (see graph). A Plenary Session of the Commission is held every two years, in conjunction with which a scientific symposium is organized.



Amongst the many tasks of EIFAC, addressing conservation aspects is becoming more and more important (see examples below) when providing advice to member states on inland fisheries issues.

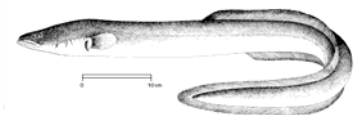
With the political and economic changes in Eastern Europe, the need to reconcile fisheries with conservation is becoming urgent: Many aquatic

habitats are in a poor state due to uncontrolled industrial development, and certain fish populations of high value have to be protected from

overexploitation, even by recreational fishing. Also, freshwater aquaculture has to be developed in an environmentally sound and sustainable way.

## Some examples

**Eel:** Catches of the European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) have dropped dramatically in recent years. Eel stocks are at an alarmingly low state, and appropriate measures are pressing. EIFAC works jointly with the ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) to investigate ways for improving the state of the stocks of the European eel, and to help formulating and implementing a management plan to safeguard the species and to promote the sustainable use of this highly valued resource.



**Sturgeon:** EIFAC works jointly with the General Fisheries Council for the Mediterranean (GFCM) to assess the state of the sturgeon stocks in the Danube, Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Adriatic Sea regions, and to help protecting sturgeons from illegal capture and exportation. Existing conservation and management measures are reviewed, and appropriate interventions for the sustainable exploitation of the stocks are advised on, including enhancement through aquaculture production and stocking.



**Bird predation:** EIFAC working party on prevention and control of bird predation: Cooperation with European ornithological and fisheries organisations. Focus on effects of cormorants (mergansers) on inland fisheries and aquaculture, and on (endangered) fish stocks on a pan-European scale

- > conflict between birds and fish of different conservation status;
- > European cormorant management plan?
- > strong need for reconciling fisheries interests with conservation.



Common merganser  
Cormorant

**Rehabilitation of rivers for fish:** The EIFAC working party on Effects of Physical Modification of the Aquatic Habitat on Fish Populations has produced a manual illustrating how rehabilitation work on running waters can be done in practice. This work exemplifies the commitment and involvement of EIFAC to restore and enhance the ecological basis of fish production, thereby reconciling fisheries with conservation.



Rehabilitated stretch of River Thur, Switzerland: hard embankments were removed, river bed was widened => dynamics of sediment transport enhanced, variability of habitats for river fish greatly improved

Photograph by A. Peter EAWAG