

March 2004



منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

Food
and
Agriculture
Organization
of
the
United
Nations

Organisation
des
Nations
Unies
pour
l'alimentation
et
l'agriculture

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

E

EUROPEAN INLAND FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMISSION

TWENTY-THIRD SESSION

Wierzba, Poland, 26 May – 2 June 2004

PROGRESS REPORT SUB-COMMISSION I - Biology and Management

Chairperson: T. Brenner (Germany)
Vice-Chairperson: P. Fitzmaurice (Ireland)
Rapporteur: K. Hensel (Slovakia)
Technical Secretary: G. Marmulla (FAO)

Activities and achievements of the Sub-Commission during the intersessional period are summarized as follows:

Joint EIFAC/ICES *ad hoc* Working Party on Eels

Convener: W. Dekker

In October 2003, the Joint EIFAC/ICES *ad hoc* Working Party on Eels met in Pasaia (Spain), at AZTI, to address the following Terms of Reference:

- a) *assess trends in recruitment, stock, and fisheries indicative for the status of the stock;*
- b) *further develop the concepts of exploitation and/or habitat restoration objectives leading towards quantitative management targets;*
- c) *assess the impact of fisheries on local stocks using harvest rate models in selected systems and relate to escapement targets, or their proxies where data conditions are poor;*
- d) *quantify the effect of loss of habitats (by region or country), taking into account the local distribution of eel stocks in rivers;*
- e) *assess density-dependent processes in local eel stock dynamics, also in relation to harvesting of recruits (glass eel);*
- f) *further develop post-evaluation procedures, quantifying effects of measures currently taken in selected systems;*
- g) *review national management plans in the light of the past ICES advice;*

h) comment on the net effect of national management plans on the stock, their deficiencies relative to recovery of eel stocks, and their potential for integration in an international stock recovery plan.

The meeting was attended by 24 experts from 9 countries. The report of this meeting is available at the ICES web site (<http://www.ices.dk/reports/ACFM/2003/WGEEL/WGEEL2004.pdf>). The report of the 2001 meeting has recently been published as EIFAC OP36.

During the first day of the meeting, the Communication from the European Commission (COM 2003, 573 final) concerning the development of an Eel Action Plan was made available. The meeting, after having read this Communication, decided to follow in general the lines of its terms of reference but to adjust the ongoing work in accordance with the COM 573 where possible. However, contrary to previous meetings, no clear-cut proposal for continuation of the WP's work in the coming years was prepared since future work will depend very much on political decisions regarding the Eel Action Plan.

The general picture of the eel stock in Europe is one of declining trends, i.e. recruitment has declined in the 1980s and has remained low in the 1990s. The 2003 recruitment appears to be of the same order of magnitude as the 2002 level, i.e. no substantial improvement since the historical minimum of 2001. Landings are in decline during a much longer period, in many countries. Statistics on landings are notoriously incomplete. FAO recently updated their data series but these official catch data are considerably at variance with working groups estimates; it was therefore decided not to present updated time series, but to plan a major revision of all data.

In preparation of the meeting, participants have written national reports on the eel stocks and fisheries. These national reports are reproduced in an Annex to the meeting report and constituted a valuable improvement to the operation of the working group itself. A system of national reporting by individual countries will be required in future, and the working group prepares to function as a clearinghouse.

The eel stock is outside safe biological limits. Current scientific knowledge is, however, inadequate to derive specific and detailed management targets. Application of general targets (escapement of at least 30 % of the unexploited spawner production) is recommended. Implementation should take place on a river catchment basis. Potential causes of the decline (including natural causes as well as man-made causes, i.e. habitat destruction, migration barriers, overexploitation) have been reviewed and time trends documented. Although no conclusive evidence for individual or synergetic effects could be compiled, anthropogenic impacts have been shown to exceed reasonable provisional targets in many places and management actions in compliance with provisional targets are therefore urgently needed.

Two new lines of thought have been initiated during this years meeting. Loss of habitat (either physical loss, or loss of accessibility) is probably involved in the decline of the eel stock. Restoration of habitats requires a quantitative target, i.e. the quantity and quality of habitats must be assessed. To this end, a Habitat Suitability Index model is developed, and applied in two examples: (a) temporal trends in the Netherlands, and (b) spatial comparison between the Netherlands and the Loire system (France). The second development concerns the assessment of compliance with management targets, specifically in relation to fisheries management. To this end, a Reference Condition Model is developed, in which current state of a stock is compared to target state values. Since stock abundance is also related to physical and environmental factors, a composite model is proposed.

The Working Party at its 2003 session in Pasaia (Spain) recommended that:

- A recovery plan for the European eel stock is compiled and implemented as a matter of urgency and that fishing and other anthropogenic impacts on production/escapement of silver eels be reduced to the lowest possible level until such a plan is agreed upon and implemented.

- Further development of methodologies to assess stock status, set conservation and management targets, assess compliance with these targets and post-evaluate the effect of appropriate management actions is required.
- Monitoring of recruitment, stocks, fisheries and escapement should at least be sustained at recent levels, whilst a stock recovery plan - including a comprehensive monitoring and research programme - is agreed upon and implemented.

ICES/ACFM has proposed preliminary Terms of Reference for the 2004 meeting of the working group (see <http://www.ices.dk/iceswork/res03org.pdf>), focusing on the advice required for implementation of the Eel Action Plan.

In May 2003, the EU has organised a meeting in Brussels for eel industry and research. During this meeting, results and advice of the EIFAC/ICES eel working group has been presented, and options for implementation discussed. The Communication by the Commission issued in October 2003 is largely in agreement with the presented advice.

Ad hoc Working Party on Fish Monitoring in Fresh Waters

Convener: P. Hickley

A meeting of the *ad hoc* Working Party on Fish Monitoring in Fresh Waters was held on 15 June 2002 in Windermere, UK, in association with the 22nd Session of EIFAC. Twenty-nine delegates representing 14 countries attended the meeting.

The WP offered guidance to the work by Mr Dehus (Germany) on the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) draft standard entitled "Water quality - Guidance on the scope and selection of fish sampling methods". Summary descriptions and a suitability matrix for the more important sampling methods were subsequently produced.

Links were maintained with the Fish-based Assessment Method for the Ecological Status of European Rivers project (FAME) by some members of the WP also being FAME partner delegates. The project started in January 2002 and is due to finish in Nov 2004. In particular, attention was paid to work package 3, defining metrics and sampling procedures, which is now complete (<http://fame.boku.ac.at>).

An uncompleted item from the former WP on Electric Fishing was the production of best practice guidance. Work on this was expedited within the remit of the convener's host country responsibilities and a draft document has been produced for consideration during the next meeting of the WP.

Given the scope for confusion and duplication of effort between the activities of the CEN, FAME and Water Framework Directive responsible bodies within member countries, the WP is attempting to facilitate information awareness and exchange by producing a bibliography of key web sites, standards and national sampling protocols.

As international information exchange is becoming increasingly important, the issue of a monthly listing of fisheries related conferences was instigated.

Ad hoc Working Party on Introductions and Stocking

Convener: I. Cowx

Review of stocking and introductions in EIFAC countries

During the intersessional period a review of stocking and introductions in EIFAC countries was completed as far as was possible based on information provided by the member countries. The review updated that produced for the European Commission.

In the previous period, members of EIFAC contributed towards the EU review on *Analysis of the Environmental And Economic Impact of Operations to Reinforce the Aquatic Fauna of Fresh Waters for Fishery Purposes* compiled by Cowx and Godkin (2000) and included data from Eastern European countries (Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Poland). The work has formed part of a PhD thesis (N. Akhter Scale and impacts of fish stock enhancement activities in three regions) from the University of Hull and will be published in due course. A key output of this study is a framework to update the EIFAC Guidelines on Stocking and Introductions. The officers and colleagues from EIFAC who provided information for the study are thanked.

European Commission Workshop

The convener of the working party represented EIFAC at the European Commission workshop entitled "The need for binding rules regarding introductions, transfers and containment of aquatic organisms in aquaculture" held in Brussels on 2 December 2003. The workshop was convened because the EU recognised that there are currently no comprehensive rules at the EU level regarding introductions, transfers and containment of aquatic organisms in aquaculture. However, in 2002 the Commission announced in its Strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture, COM(2002) 511 final (19/9/2002), the intention to propose management rules on the introduction of non-indigenous aquatic species in aquaculture. It was stated that these rules would be consistent with the provisions of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Code of Practice on the Introductions and Transfer of Marine Organisms. The intention to develop guidelines on containment, so as to minimize salmon escapees in particular was announced in the same Communication. The convener presented a position statement on the EIFAC guidelines for stocking and introductions and the work in progress. This was contrasted with guidelines being produced by ICES and NASCO to help elucidate a common strategy for minimizing the impact of stocking and introductions in European Union countries. It should be noted the EIFAC work was received favourably and requests were made to accelerate the output, but this is constrained by financial resources. However, the opportunity will be taken to promote these guidelines through a UK Environment Agency project on guidelines for stocking and introduction of fish and a proposed intervention by FAO to produce guidelines on stock enhancement to implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Symposia

It is proposed that the Working Party takes advantage of the specialist session on Invasive species at the 11th Ichthyological Congress in Estonia in September 2004 to discuss issues concerning the guidelines on introductions. Details of the session can be found on the conference web site (<http://www.sea.ee/ECI>).

The 13th international Conference on Aquatic Invasive Species is to be held in Sligo, Ireland in September 2004. Further details of the meeting can be found on www.aquatic-invasive-species-conference.org. Although this meeting concentrates mainly on marine systems, it is recommended that any member of EIFAC attending prepares a short report of the meeting for the EXCOM meeting.

Ad hoc Working Party on Maps of fish distribution and aquatic habitat quality

Convener: R. Fricke

The *ad hoc* Working Party on Mapping of Fish Distribution and Aquatic Habitat Quality is in the process to be established. At present, the convener is contacting potential experts to ascertain their availability to serve on the Working Party. Candidates on the list include representatives from Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Experts from Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia,

Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Slovakia, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Cyprus must be identified.

The Working Party will convene a meeting during the 23rd EIFAC Session to debate the way forward.

***Ad hoc* Working Party on Management of sturgeon**

Convener: M. Chebanov

The joint EIFAC/GFCM *ad hoc* Working Party on Management of Sturgeon was established at the Twenty-second Session of the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission in Windermere, UK, in June 2002.

In order to determine the current status of stocks and exploitation a questionnaire has been prepared by the Convener and, after consultation with the EIFAC Secretariat and the Chairman of the Sub-Commission, sent to all members of the Working Party. The information resulting from the questionnaire will be discussed at a meeting of the Working Party to be held in Poland during the Twenty-third Session of the EIFAC. The questionnaire was also sent to the GFCM Secretariat inviting them to identify experts and to encourage them to share the efforts of the Working Party on management of Sturgeon.

During the intersessional period the Working Party has maintained appropriate linkages with relevant organizations such as the Black Sea Sturgeon Management Group (BSSMG), a consultative and coordinative body that develops regional protocols of monitoring and assessment of the status of stocks and natural reproduction of sturgeons in the Black Sea basin and that determines annual total allowable regional and national catch quotas (for each species at basin level) as a recommendation for the CITES.

The Working Party continues to maintain co-operation with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

Some members of the Working Party have been involved in establishing the new World Sturgeon Conservation Society (WSCS) and in its various activities such as

- preparation of bibliography on biology, conservation, ecology, management and culture of sturgeon;
- cooperation with FishBase
- participation in the General Assembly and Board of Directors that was held in New Wulmstorf, Germany on January 2004.

Further collaboration with related WSCS efforts possibly would be very promising.

The experts from the Working Party are taking an active part in the preparation of Workshops closely related to the TOR of the Working Group, i.e. Symposium on Sturgeon Rehabilitation and Management during the American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting (Madison, USA, August 22-26 2004); Workshop on Conservation of Sturgeons linked to the 19th International Zoological Congress in Beijing (August 23-27 2004); and 5th International Symposium on Sturgeons (Ramsar, Iran, 9-13 May 2005).

Members of the Working Party, including the Convener, have been invited to join the teams involved in preparing for the following prospective projects:

- Caspian Environment Programme (CEP), Sustainable Management of Caspian Fisheries
- Protection of Sturgeons from illegal importation and exportation – GEF (Turkey)

The Working Party could also contribute to raise awareness through the mechanisms of an own homepage or one associated with the EIFAC or WSCS homepages. The Convener agreed to initiate this activity in collaboration with the Secretariat and other members of the Working Party.