

Eel stocks in England and Wales

2012 review of Eel Management Plans

October 2012

Background

In 2007, the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas advised that the European eel stock was in decline and that the recruitment of eel into European rivers had fallen to less than 10% of 1970s levels. This prompted the European Union to engage member states in a recovery plan, to reduce and reverse the decline. Key to delivering this plan is a [Council Regulation](#) that requires all member states to produce Eel Management Plans. These plans set out how we will meet challenging targets for the number of adult eel that leave their rivers to spawn at sea. In 2009, Defra published the UK plans and, three years on, has just completed its first progress report for Europe.

What the report says

The report describes how the UK is progressing against its targets. It does not include recommendations for management, but provides an assessment of what we understand the current level of compliance to be.

The report suggests only 1 of the 11 river basins in England and Wales (the Thames) is meeting its escapement target. Two river basins (South East and Northumbria) are close to the target.

In 2009, when we first published the Eel Management Plans, we understood only 2 river basins were failing their targets. It is important that we now investigate and understand the perceived change.

What has changed?

Does this mean a reduction in eel stocks in a further 8 river basins? Not necessarily.

When the plans were first produced in 2009, the model we used suggested that two of the 11 River Basin Districts were not meeting their target. In the intervening years we have refined the model and a revised, more precise, technique has been used in the current assessment of eel populations.

The new model suggests the picture in England and Wales is worse than originally thought and eel production in many more areas is being affected by human activity. However, while the estimates of eel production and mortality are based on the best available evidence, there are some significant uncertainties associated with them. We have had to rely heavily on extrapolating data from small study areas to the river basin as a whole and make a number of necessarily precautionary assumptions. We need to test some of these assumptions and will adjust the estimates accordingly.

What we will do next

We will continue working to reduce the impacts of tidal flaps, water supply intakes, barriers to migration, and poor wetland habitats. Where possible, we will work with and through partners. We will also review the impacts of fisheries and consult widely on the implications of our assessments.

How you/others can engage

We will set up local working groups in each river basin for all those interested in eel stocks to work together to address the local impacts.

If you would like to be involved, please contact Martin James, Environment & Business Advisor: Tel 01925 542 034 or email: martin.james@environment-agency.gov.uk