



RESOLUTION

The Continued Decline of the European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*)

The European Anglers Alliance, which represents 19 European nations and more than 5 million anglers, held its 9th General Assembly on 4th – 7th April 2003 in Leipzig, and discussed the serious decline of the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) in European waters

Eel stocks across Europe have shown continued decline for many years. One contributing factor is the increasing pressure from commercial exploitation by netting, often illegally, at all stages of the lifecycle to supply the international trade across Europe and the Far East in both elvers and eels. The decline has been accelerated with increased pressures on breeding stocks from loss of habitats, obstructions to migration, and the possible effects from parasites (*Anguillicola crassus*). If measures are not implemented rapidly the long-term survival of the species will be threatened.

The complex life cycle of freshwater eels has been relatively understudied for many years, but it fills a major niche within the aquatic eco-system and is a major part of the diet for many species of water birds. Increased monitoring and survey work is needed so as to fully understand the current status of stocks, and to assess the future management options for this unique species.

The European Anglers Alliance requests:

- Increased co-operation across Europe to introduce measures that will contribute to, and secure, the long-term survival of the eel.
- Restrictions to limit the numbers of nets within the commercial fishery particularly in areas which show continued declines in population stocks - (ICES Recommendation to reduce effects of commercial fisheries at ALL stages of the eel's lifecycle)
- Measures to minimize obstructions to both upstream migration of elvers and downstream migration of mature eels.
- Introduction of a restocking programme of elvers into areas currently showing low population densities due to migration obstructions or that have shown a serious decline in mature eel escapement due to over-exploitation.
- Increased funding for survey work to accurately assess eel population dynamics so as to better monitor current stock status and the effects of management plan actions.
- Increased funding and commitment to intensify of the fight against illegal netmen.
- Introduction of legislation to require all sales and exports of elvers and eels to be through licensed registered dealerships, (UK recommendation from MAFF freshwater fisheries review 2000)
- Recognition and protection of the eel's role in the eco-system of the aquatic environment. A commitment to include the protection of eel stocks in wider plans to promote aquatic bio-diversity (Rio action plans, EU Habitats and Freshwater Fisheries Directives).
- Increased research into *Anguillicola crassus* to determine its possible effects on mature eel migration survival.
- Management plans at a river basin level (Water framework Directive), to promote increased numbers of escaping mature eels so as to increase breeding stock.

The European Anglers Alliance urges those responsible in all European countries and within the European Commission to acknowledge the importance of the European eel to European biodiversity and to act quickly to halt the decline of this unique species.