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(Accepted 8 May 2001)

History of The Eifac/Ices Eel Meetings

The European Working Group on Eel is now 30 years old. The European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC), a regional commission of the FAO, at the request of Ireland introduced the item "Biology and Management of the Eel" at the fifth session held in Rome (Italy) in May 1968. One of the recommendations was that "member countries directly interested in this topic give consideration to the holding of a meeting of appropriate experts to pursue the eel study". The very first EIFAC meeting on eel was in 1970 in Hamburg (Germany) about "eel fishing gear". Another in Montpellier (France) in 1975 was about "age determination of eels". The European Working Group was born.

Places of the meetings

Investigations on eel have become a subject of wide international cooperation, which began when the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission started to promote joint efforts in Rome (1968). An ad hoc working group on eel fishing gear and techniques was established and a meeting was held in Hamburg (Germany-1970). In 1975, in Montpellier, a workshop on comparative ageing took place⁽¹⁾.

In 1976, for the first time, EIFAC jointly with ICES

(International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea) held a symposium on eel in Helsinki (Finland)⁽²⁾. A further step was taken for assistance in defining ways of cooperation. Since this date, a working party on eel has taken place nearly every year (Tab I).

Table 1. List of dates and participants on eel working party that has taken place nearly every year.

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Montpellier	1975	19
Helsinki	1976	20
Hamburg	1980	25
Ferrare	1981	35
Salzburg	1982	20
Stockholm	1983	29
Perpignan	1985	67
Bristol	1987	74
Porto	1989	66
Dublin	1991	52
Olsztyn	1993	46
Oviedo	1994	40
Ijmuiden	1996	41
Silkeborg	1999	41

An other joint meeting was held in 1994 in Oviedo (Spain) with the European Society of Ichthyology⁽³⁾.

Organisation

All arrangements are planned by a steering committee consisting of a chairman, a rapporteur and other members. The chairmen were the following: McGrath (1970-1983), Tesch (1984-1989), Moriarty (1991-1997), Dekker (1999-...) Various topics of discussions were proposed. Papers submitted and other information are presented by participants and discussed. All discussions, conclusions and recommendations were presented in a report.

In many occasions papers were published in a special volume of an international journal (see references).

Participation

All European countries interested with eels are invited to participate in the working parties.

Participants coming from Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Austria, Ireland, Norway ... and Israel were generally present. People coming from Canada, China, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand joined the meeting, opening the discussion to other species (*Anguilla rostrata*, *Anguilla japonica*, *Anguilla australis*...).

Topics

Presentations and discussions covered a wide range of researches on the eel:

- ocean stages
- recruitment
- age and growth
- eel culture
- parasitic infestation and contamination
- fisheries

- effects of exploitation on stock and yield...

The main results were the following:

- a synopsis about eel (Deelder, 1974)
- an international eel expedition for the exploration of the spawning grounds of the eel in the Sargasso Sea (Tesch, 1979 and 1981)
- a technical paper about eel age determination (Vollestad and Lecomte Finiger, 1988) and about marking and tagging (Nielsen, 1988)

The main observations were the following:

- 1982: for the first time a decline in glass eels catches was observed in France and in Netherlands
- 1985: a great decrease in recruitment was observed and a new potential danger appeared, the parasite *Anguillicola crassus*
- 1989: eel was considered as an endangered species
- 1994: a management plan was discussed because the stock was very low, because the recruitment failure lasted for a time period equivalent to the average life span of a mature eel
- 1996: a management plan was published
- 1999: *Anguillicola* was recorded in *Anguilla rostrata* for the first time; situation of the European stock was dramatic.

The need for supra-national management of the European stock was pointed out. Monitoring programmes have to be recommended and the working group established a monitoring regime for recruitment at the European continent. Causes of the decline have to be resolved.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, a French Eel Group has been created. Many simple questions still have no answer despite scientific progress. In the meantime, following the recommendations of this group, the French status of the European eel (considered as a nuisance) changed from the legal point of view and in the public opinion. Managers and administration now pay attention to its safeguarding.

A decline of the European eel was announced in 1984 by the French Eel Group and confirmed later by the EIFAC/ICES Group. The diversity and the complexity of problems involved in the decline of the species imply interdisciplinary national and international collaborations. We hope research programmes to be undertaken on *Anguilla anguilla*, essential for the safeguard of this species.

References

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