

The European Eel

Factsheet 3

Eel Fisheries in the UK

There are 3 types of eel fishery in England and Wales:

- The elver (or glass eel) fishery which captures the young eel as they return to the rivers. This focussed on the Severn estuary with commercial fisheries on the Rivers Parret and Severn. There is also some exploitation on the Usk and Wye and in Cumbria. Existing byelaws prevent elver fishing elsewhere in the country.
- There are yellow eel (the resident life stage) fisheries across the country. These are mainly in the lower reaches of the rivers and the top end of estuaries. The Thames and many of the East Anglian rivers support yellow eel fisheries.
- Silver eel fisheries are now quite rare and are usually in the form of eel racks. These intercept silver eel on their way back to the sea.

Glass eel fishing takes place in the early spring; the yellow eel season is from April to November; and silver eels are caught as they migrate down rivers during the autumn equinox.



Regulations

Until the end of 2010, eel net and trap fishing is regulated through a combination of licences and byelaws. In January 2011, authorisations will replace licences.

The key differences between licences and authorisations are that we can place conditions on authorisations to make sure fishing practices remain sustainable and restrict how many we issue, to protect stocks. If necessary, we can revoke authorisations. We

will use authorisations to cap eel and elver fisheries at existing levels and only seek to reduce how many we issue if there is clear evidence that we should or if we are instructed to by the Europe.

National eel net and trap fishing byelaws have been in place since 2001. These set out what fishing methods are legal and the design and construction of nets and traps. They also prohibit elver fishing outside of established fisheries. These byelaws should be replaced in January 2011. These will -

- improving the quality of catch returns from eel and elver net fishers;
- prohibiting net fishing at locations where elvers are particularly vulnerable;
- specifying more precisely what fishing equipment and methods can be used to catch eel and elver;
- ban certain fishing methods, including trawling, for eel and elver.

More information

The latest international advice on eel stocks can be found at -
<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2009/2009/eel-eur.pdf>.

Current eel fishing byelaws can be found at -
<http://www.efishbusiness.co.uk/formsandguides/Eel-Elver-Byelaws.pdf>.

The Eel (England and Wales) Regulations can be found at -
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2009/3344/contents/made.

Details of fishing authorisations can be found at -
<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/fish>.

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