



Fourth Meeting of Range States for the European Eel

Malmö, Sweden, 14-15 October 2025

UNEP/CMS/Eels4/Report

**REPORT OF THE 4TH MEETING
OF THE RANGE STATES FOR THE EUROPEAN
EEL**

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14 - 15 October 2025

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REPORT OF THE 4TH MEETING OF RANGE STATES FOR THE EUROPEAN EEL

1. Opening of the meeting and welcoming remarks

1. Melanie Virtue, Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), welcomed participants, expressing hope that the meeting will serve to finalize the development of a Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) for the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*).
2. David Freestone, Sargasso Sea Commission, noted the opportune timing of the meeting ahead of the 15th meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties (23-29 March 2026), which could adopt the SSAP.
3. Jessica Nilsson, Sweden, welcomed the participation of a wide range of experts who have been contributing to the SSAP's development.

2. Election of the Chair

4. Participants elected Sweden as the Chair of the meeting.

3. Adoption of the agenda and schedule

5. Chair Jacob Hagberg (Sweden) introduced the agenda and schedule ([CMS/Eels4/Doc.4.1](#)), noting the objective to discuss the September 2025 version of the draft SSAP ([UNEP/CMS/Eels4/Doc.4.2](#)).
6. The agenda was adopted as presented.

4. Recap of the CMS process to date

7. Melanie Virtue, CMS Secretariat, provided an overview of eel-related work under CMS, highlighting that:
 - the European eel was added to CMS Appendix II in 2014, building on a proposal by Monaco;
 - a first workshop in 2016 brought together Range States and experts on the European and American eel to discuss the protection of spawning areas in the high sea areas of the Sargasso Sea;
 - the workshop highlighted the need to include key Range States from North Africa, developed a questionnaire to identify gaps, and concluded that it was not feasible to simultaneously address the European and American eel;
 - CMS COP12 adopted a Concerted Action for the species;
 - the second Range State meeting, convened in 2018, mandated the development of a legal agreement for the conservation and management of the European eel;
 - the third meeting in 2019 discussed a draft legal agreement, but concluded it was premature to negotiate such an instrument and instead mandated the development of a SSAP under CMS;
 - the draft SSAP was circulated in March 2025 and revised based on Range State comments received by July 2025; and
 - the fourth Range State meeting is tasked with finalizing the draft SSAP so that it can be adopted by CMS COP15.

5. Update on the BBNJ process

8. David Freestone, Sargasso Sea Commission, noted that the Sargasso Sea, which encompasses the islands of Bermuda, is a high seas ecosystem in the North Atlantic in which the European eel spawns. He highlighted that the Sargassum weed, held in place by a sub-tropical gyre in that area, provides a spawning ground and nursery for many commercially important species as well as threatened and endangered species such as turtles, and that the Sargasso Sea is an important migratory corridor for humpback whales.
9. He highlighted that the [2014 Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea](#) was the first signal of political intent to protect a high seas area. The Declaration mandated the appointment of a commission, composed of scientists, which is now working on ecosystem monitoring, the negotiation of a strategic action programme to define management measures, and stakeholder engagement.
10. Freestone then provided an overview of the process that led to the adoption of a legally binding agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), highlighting, among other things, that:
 - the process took many years, with initial discussions dating back to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg;
 - the BBNJ Agreement was opened for signature in 2023;
 - the Agreement addresses marine genetic resources, area-based management tools (ABMTs), environmental impact assessments (EIA), and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology; and
 - now that it has received a sufficient number of ratifications, it will enter into force in January 2026.
11. With regards to ABMTs, he noted the BBNJ Agreement:
 - provides for the establishment of ABMTs by the BBNJ COP following a three-quarter majority vote, if consensus is elusive;
 - requires inclusive consultations with stakeholders; and
 - mandates the BBNJ Scientific and Technical Body to review ABMT proposals.
12. He highlighted that many provisions of the BBNJ Agreement are relevant for the Sargasso Sea and the conservation of the European eel, notably:
 - the possibility of establishing ABMTs in the Sargasso Sea; and
 - the potential triggering of EIAs, which would be especially relevant for deep-sea mining projects that could lead to a trapping of debris in the gyre area and catastrophic effects on eels and other species.

6. State of conservation and management of *Anguilla anguilla*

13. Matt Gollock, IUCN Anguillid Eel Specialist Group, highlighted that:
 - there are 16 species of Anguillid eels, with diverging opinions on the number of sub-species and populations;
 - eel species are distinguished based on whether they are temperate or tropical and mottled or bi-coloured;
 - eels have a complex life cycle, notably because they span a large geographical area with parts of their life cycle spent in the sea and others in continental regions, they reproduce only once in their lifetime (12-13 years for European eels), and breed as a single population;

- threats vary depending on the species and location, but include climate change and resulting changes in oceanic current, disease and parasitism, pollution, barriers to migration (e.g. related to hydropower), habitat loss, and unsustainable exploitation and trade; and
- many threats are not yet fully understood, including climate change impacts and the effects of lower lipid stores on fecundity.

14. With regard to the European eel, he noted that:

- there has been a 90 per cent decline in the recruitment of juvenile European eels since records began in 1960, and the IUCN Red List considers the species to be critically endangered;
- they have the longest migration range of all eels; and
- they are already subject to several management frameworks, including:
 - a 2007 European Council Eel Regulation;
 - a listing on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 2008;
 - a CMS Appendix II listing in 2014;
 - 2018 Recommendations by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM); and
 - the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's (ICES) zero-mortality advice issued in 2022.

15. Gollock also noted that the draft SSAP features high-level aims, with flexibility to adjust to local contexts, and the majority of management measures remain limited to continental waters (coastal areas, estuaries, rivers and lakes).

7. Other ongoing processes

16. Caroline Durif, Joint Working Group on Eels (WGEEL) of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)/ICES/GFCM, presented on the WGEEL's ongoing work. She noted that:

- ICES classifies the European eel as "Category 3", meaning there are no full stock assessments for the species (which would allow forecasting), but there are survey-based assessments which serve to indicate trends and provide management advice;
- a first recruitment decline in European eels was observed in 1985, with the decline lasting for an entire eel generation and affecting spawner production;
- 1960-1979 levels are used as a reference point for assessments, as the stock was then assumed to be at a good level;
- differences in recruitment for the glass eel life stage are observed between the North Sea and the southern part of the range, with another index providing insights on recruitment at the later yellow eel life stage; and
- since 2022, ICES advises that, under the precautionary approach, there should be zero catch and no anthropogenic mortality.

17. She underscored the objective to increase knowledge on the species with a view to providing a full stock assessment, but noted that this is challenging because:

- there is extreme variation in life history traits, with eels in the Spanish Dead Sea (Mar Menor) maturing much faster than in northern Norway (2-6 years compared to 20-50 years);
- sex ratios differ between regions, with southern areas tending to produce more males compared to northern areas; and
- threats differ throughout the range, leading to varying mortality rates.

18. Karen Gaynor, CITES Secretariat, presented on [CITES Appendices](#), highlighting that:
- any Party can submit a listing proposal for species that meet certain biological and trade criteria;
 - changes to Appendices I and II are decided by the CITES CoP, while Appendix III is amended based on Parties' requests without need for approval by the CoP;
 - species are listed on CITES Appendix II when they are not necessarily threatened with extinction, as is the case for Appendix I, but their trade must be regulated to avoid them becoming threatened;
 - the European eel's listing on CITES Appendix II means that international commercial trade in the species is allowed, but is controlled (compared to a general prohibition under Appendix I);
 - the American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) was listed on Appendix III in [October 2025](#), at the request of the Dominican Republic, which means that exports and imports of the species will require permits and/or a certificate of origin, and Parties will need to report annually on relevant trade data; and
 - any Party can apply stricter domestic measures.
19. She further pointed to:
- ongoing work on aquaculture production and the risks and benefits of reintroducing seized live European eels to the wild;
 - the difficulty for enforcement officers of distinguishing between eel species, particularly with regard to the trade in processed products such as fillets;
 - the development of a genus-wide [draft resolution and draft decision](#) on eels for consideration by CITES CoP20 (November 2025), noting these will likely be subject to substantial discussions; and
 - a [proposal](#) by the European Union, Honduras and Panama to include all anguillid eels in Appendix II, which will require a two-thirds majority to be adopted by CoP20.

8. Introduction to the Single Species Action Plan for the European Eel (*Anguilla Anguilla*)

20. Matt Gollock, who led the drafting of the European eel SSAP, recalled that the development of the September 2025 version of the draft ([UNEP/CMS/Eels4/Doc.4.2](#)) was informed by several rounds of feedback. He also highlighted that its development was informed by the recently adopted Angelshark SSAP, with a view to ensuring consistency across SSAPs, and that the SSAP aims to acknowledge work conducted through other mechanisms and avoid duplication of reporting.
21. He clarified that:
- common feedback was incorporated into the revised draft SSAP, but some elements raised by individual Parties may need to be discussed at this meeting;
 - some points raised in the feedback were not addressed because they did not fit the expected structure of a SSAP;
 - the meeting should agree on the SSAP's goal, ensuring consistency with the Angelshark SSAP;
 - actions are defined at a high level to provide flexibility for national specificities;
 - some actions are considered essential for the SSAP to be effective, such as the development of a national threat matrix; and
 - there are still gaps in the draft, which are expected to be filled at this meeting.

9. Discussion of the draft Action Plan

22. Chair Hagberg noted that the CMS Secretariat will revise the September 2025 version of the draft SSAP ([UNEP/CMS/Eels4/Doc.4.2](#)) based on the discussions during the meeting so that it can be considered for adoption at COP15.
23. The deadline for the Secretariat to submit documents for consideration by COP15 has, in principle, already passed, but it has received a special dispensation to account for the timing of the 4th Meeting of Range States for the European Eel. Nevertheless, the revised draft would need to be processed right after the closure of the meeting to ensure the document can be translated into all official CMS languages in due time. The revised draft SSAP would then be presented to the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council at its 8th meeting (ScC-SC8, December 2025). ScC-SC8 could make suggestions that will be forwarded to COP15, where the draft SSAP will be open for further negotiation.
24. The Secretariat also suggested using the meeting as an opportunity to start reflecting on a possible COP Decision on the European eel, pointing to the example of the recent adoption of the Angelshark SSAP and the related Decision ([Decision 14.101](#)).
25. Over the course of the meeting, participants held several rounds of discussion on the draft SSAP, with the Secretariat continuously incorporating suggested revisions.
26. On the **taxon** (section 1.1), participants debated a list of common names for the species across languages (in Table 1). The Secretariat noted these tend to differ, even between countries using the same language, which is why CMS generally refers only to scientific names to ensure clarity.
27. With regard to **distribution** (section 1.2), participants debated the identification of Range States (Figure 2), with some noting that Austria does not consider itself a Range States and that the Danube is not considered to be natural eel habitat. They emphasized the distinction between natural distribution and distribution resulting from anthropogenic changes, noting that the presence of the European eel in some areas is due to restocking. The Secretariat also noted that the concept of Range State for marine species extends to countries whose flag vessels have an impact on the species. Participants agreed to revise the relevant map (Figure 2), emphasizing the focus on the species' distribution based on observational data.
28. With regard to **threats** (section 2), discussions related to, among other things:
 - predation, with participants noting it is a natural process, whereas the SSAP focuses on anthropogenic threats, but that conservation efforts geared towards other species may have implications for eel predation;
 - the distinction between non-native and invasive species, with participants agreeing to refer to invasive alien species; and
 - the United Kingdom's Non-Detriment Finding (NDF), with some speakers recalling ICES' zero-mortality advice, and participants agreeing to note that the UK's NDF is the only published assessment of sustainability of European eel fisheries.
29. Gollock noted that Parties had expressed divergent views as to whether the information on existing **policies and legislation relevant for management** (section 3) should be provided in the main body of the SSAP or moved to an annex. Participants noted that the section provides only an overview of relevant instruments, bodies and conventions, and agreed to annex the relevant tables to the SSAP. They discussed the value of adding a reference to the BBNJ Agreement but agreed it may be better to wait as a number of countries are still undergoing the ratification process and the overview would therefore quickly become

outdated. They suggested specifying that the list of Range States is based on the ICES stock assessment.

30. The Secretariat noted it will invite Parties to submit information on relevant legislation to be included in the annexed overview of national and EU legislation specific to the protection and conservation of the European eel.
31. Participants reflected on the **goal** of the draft SSAP (section 4.1): *“To strengthen the conservation and management of the European eel across its full range by coordinating, harmonising, and implementing actions that stimulate species recovery allowing it to fulfil its role in healthy ecosystems.”* They agreed that the goal should be more specific and that the reference to eels’ ecological role is too ambiguous. Instead of *“stimulate species recovery”*, they converged on *“in order to ensure the species is within safe biological limits”*. They also added to the list of actions which now reads *“reviewing, coordinating, harmonizing and implementing actions”*. Participants also agreed on the need to specify a time frame. Because of the significant variation in life history traits across regions, several speakers cautioned against a proposed 30-year time frame.
32. Discussions then focused on the **objectives, actions and results** of the SSAP (section 4.2). With some participants questioning whether threats to the species can be considered *“well characterized”*, they agreed to note that individual impacts are well documented but cumulative impacts are poorly understood. Participants also agreed to highlight that:
 - the objectives and actions of existing mechanisms are not necessarily harmonized and assessing their results may be a challenge;
 - the SSAP may enhance the implementation of existing mechanisms;
 - Range States are at different stages of developing management plans for the species; and
 - the focus of the SSAP lies in mitigating “anthropogenic” threats.
33. On the **objectives framework** (section 4.5), Gollock noted that some Parties had previously called for definitions of the *“essential, high, medium, low”* categorization of activities. He highlighted that such definitions were not included in other SSAPs and therefore not included in the current draft. The Secretariat clarified that, in the context of the Angelshark SSAP, the *“essential”* label is used to mark elements that experts consider to be crucial and whose priority should not be downgraded by any Party, while the categorization as *“high, medium, or low”* is jointly agreed by Range States.
34. Participants agreed to specify that there is no expectation for new mechanisms to be developed in response to the SSAP if equivalent actions are already in place through existing frameworks, noting that the strengthening of such frameworks and their implementation is encouraged.
35. In relation to **national implementation** (section 4.6), they acknowledged that there are varying capacities and regulatory frameworks across Range States and that these should be accounted for in the implementation of the SSAP.
36. Much of the discussion focused on a table on **proposed activities** (section 4.8), with participants reflecting on proposed objectives, actions, timescales and the stakeholders involved in each action.
37. With regard to **coordination** (objective 1), participants revised the formulation of the objective to clarify that the ultimate aim is the delivery of enhanced conservation. They reflected on a call for Range States to consider the inclusion of the species on CMS Appendix I if no signs of recovery are observed. Participants were generally supportive of adding such an action to the SSAP and debates centered on whether this should be the case if no signs are observed

“by 2033” or “within 30 years”, as timelines suggested in accordance with the species’ lifespan. They decided against specifying a deadline, as the species’ status may warrant earlier intervention, and instead agreed to mandate Range States to assess the matter on a regular basis.

38. The Secretariat noted that, for some SSAPs, the Range States adopt a common threat matrix, but in the case of the European eel it may be more appropriate for each Range State to define its own threat matrix, as threat prioritization varies across the species range.
39. Participants agreed to add actions on:
 - identifying shared areas of priority and cooperation among Range States to address these threats;
 - providing support to Range States where capacity to deliver the SSAP is limited;
 - ensuring that management measures are in line with relevant scientific advice; and
 - strengthening awareness and communication targeting all stakeholders.
40. They had a broad discussion on reporting requirements related to the SSAP, with comments relating to, among other things:
 - avoiding duplication with existing reporting processes, such as those related to EU regulations, ICES and the GFCM;
 - ensuring that reporting related to the SSAP constitutes a step forward compared to existing mechanisms; and
 - building on data-collection methodologies developed by expert groups.
41. On **barriers to eel migration** (objective 2), discussions highlighted that EU Member States are already subject to relevant obligations, such as to bring surface waters back to a good environmental status and to produce an inventory of such barriers with a view to removing them at the latest by 2050, as mandated under the EU Nature Restoration Regulation. The same does not apply to other Range States.
42. Participants emphasized that the mitigation of **habitat loss** (objective 3) is a key challenge, which will likely only be achieved over a longer timescale. They also:
 - highlighted the need for expert involvement in the development of relevant models;
 - emphasized the role of climate change in habitat loss;
 - agreed to differentiate between the identification of key locations for rewilding as a “short-term” action and the subsequent “ongoing” implementation of relevant measures and monitoring of their effectiveness; and
 - agreed to assess and reduce the impacts of invasive alien species.
43. The issue of **exploitation** (objective 4) was subject to much debate. Some participants sought to address the broader impacts of human activities and associated mortality, noting ICES’ zero-mortality advice. Others advocated for retaining the dedicated focus on fisheries and trade, with the CITES Secretariat highlighting the relevance of [Target 5](#) of the Global Biodiversity Framework to “ensure that the use, harvesting, and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe, and legal.” Ultimately, they agreed to:
 - add, under objective 1, an action on reducing all sources of anthropogenic mortality in line with scientific advice;
 - add actions on reducing mortality in line with scientific advice under each of the threat-related objectives (barriers, habitat loss, exploitation, pollutants, and parasites and diseases); and
 - retain the objective to eliminate unsustainable exploitation, with a focus on fisheries and trade.

44. Participants questioned the notion, contained in the draft SSAP, that sustainable harvest “matches legal demand” with a view to minimizing “surplus” that may be traded illegally. Gollock clarified that this was meant to refer to catch that was, for example, legally harvested in the EU but surpassed the level of domestic demand and which may therefore end up being traded illegally. Participants supported the deletion of these points, noting that demand varies from year to year and illegal trade is driven by a variety of factors.
45. They also agreed on the importance of:
 - accounting for aquaculture;
 - collecting data on both commercial and recreational fisheries, noting that insights on the latter is lacking in many countries;
 - sharing data across the range;
 - ensuring that restocking programmes are in line with scientific advice, with several participants cautioning that restocking is not considered a mitigation measure;
 - strengthening not only the traceability but also the “control” of fisheries and associated trade; and
 - improving collaboration among law-enforcement agencies to enhance investigative and prosecutorial best practice to identify illegal trade routes and share intelligence, with participants noting the need to involve transit and importing countries as well as agencies such as Interpol and Europol.
46. With regard to **pollutants** (objective 5), some participants questioned the reference to “key toxicants”, noting that not all pollutants are monitored and there is a lack of knowledge on the effects of pollutants on eel reproduction. They highlighted, among other things:
 - the value of identifying pollutant levels in eel sub-stocks with a view to prioritizing mitigation actions, taking into consideration the expected impacts on reproductive success;
 - that determining whether pollutant levels in eels are above the threshold for reproductive success would be essential for conducting reliable stock assessments; and
 - that the definition of a threshold for reproductive success could serve to better target restocking and ban it in areas where eels are above the threshold.
47. Participants debated a suggestion to address microplastics, with some cautioning that, if anything, nanoplastics would be more relevant, and others emphasizing the limited knowledge on eel diets. They agreed that the relevant actions should address “pollutants” rather than “toxicants”, noting that this covers plastics.
48. Regarding the objective to improve understanding of the impacts of **parasites and diseases** (objective 6), participants emphasized the need to go beyond “improved understanding” and foster impact reduction, addressing matters related to biosecurity, transport of eels and veterinarian control. They agreed on the need to develop or apply existing biosecurity guidelines to inhibit the spread of parasites and diseases through the transport and release of eels, and undertake activities to reduce the spread of parasites and diseases and their impacts on the eel population.
49. Other points related to, among other things:
 - acknowledging cumulative impacts;
 - including examples of metrics to monitor the effectiveness of management measures;
 - establishing national data-collection programmes where these do not yet exist; and
 - encouraging Parties to share knowledge and best practices with each other.
50. Participants then briefly considered a proposal for a draft Resolution adopting the SSAP and related draft Decisions on the European eel. The Secretariat noted that COP Decisions cover elements to be addressed between COP sessions, whereas Resolutions encapsulate longer-term elements.

51. Discussions focused on the governance arrangements that may be established in support of the SSAP's implementation. The Secretariat noted that such arrangements can take on various forms, including pooling funding for a coordinator and having Parties take on the position of Chair on a rolling basis, cautioning that the Secretariat has limited capacity and would require funding to support these efforts.

10. Next steps

52. The Secretariat highlighted important deadlines:
- the Secretariat will format, edit and send out for translation the revised draft SSAP and related cover document right after the closure of the meeting;
 - the Secretariat will share an advanced unedited version with the meeting participants as soon as possible after the meeting;
 - documents for consideration by COP15 will be published in the three official CMS languages by 23 November 2025;
 - [ScC-SC8](#), which convenes between 5 and 18 December 2025, will review and comment on the SSAP; and
 - [CMS COP15](#), which takes place from 23 to 29 March 2026, offers another opportunity for further negotiations on adopting the SSAP. A [document for COP15](#) has been made available on the CMS website.

11. Closure of the meeting

53. After the customary expressions of gratitude, the Chair closed the meeting.

Annex – List of Participants

	Participant	Position/ Institution/ Organization	Email
Range State			
Albania	Edit Vardhami	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Edit.Vardhami@mjedisi.gov.al
Algeria	Hanafi Hanniche	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries	hannichehanafi@gmail.com
Belgium	Kristof Vlietinck	Flemish Authorities - Nature and Forests Agency	kristof.vlietinck@vlaanderen.be
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Nada Mlinar	Ministry of the Foreign Trade and Economic Relations	nada.mlinar@mvteo.gov.ba
European Union (Online)	Staffan Danielsson	European Commission DG Mare	Staffan.Danielsson@ec.europa.eu
European Union (Online)	Katarzyna Janiak	European Commission DG Mare	katarzyna.janiak@ec.europa.eu
European Union (Online)	Juan Perez Lorenzo	European Commission DG Environment	Juan.Perez-Lorenzo@ec.europa.eu
European Union (Online)	Hans Stielstra	European Commission DG Environment	hans.Stielstra@ec.europa.eu
Finland	Jani Helminen	Natural Resources Institute Finland	jani.helminen@luke.fi
Georgia	Tornike Zautashvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture	Tornike.zautashvili@mepa.gov.ge
Germany	Étienne Vergne-Klangwald	Federal Ministry for the Environment	etienne.vergne-klangwald@bmukn.bund.de
Germany	Reinhold Hanel	Thünen Institute of Fisheries Ecology	reinhold.hanel@thuenen.de
Monaco	Céline Impagliazzo	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation	cimpagliazzo@gouv.mc
Montenegro	Aleksandar Perović	Environmental Protection Agency - EPA	aleksandar.perovic@epa.gov.me
Morocco	Mohamed Badr Laamiri	Agence Nationale des Eaux et Forêts	laamirimb@gmail.com
North Macedonia	Isuf Fetai	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning	i.fetai@moepp.gov.mk
Sweden	Jacob Hagberg (Chair)	Ministry of Climate and Enterprise	jacob.hagberg@gov.se
Sweden	Jessica Nilsson	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management	jessica.nilsson@havochvatten.se
Sweden	Sofia Brockmark	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management	sofia.brockmark@havochvatten.se
Sweden	Ninni Lundblad	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency	ninni.lundblad@naturvardsverket.se
Türkiye	Şükran Yalçın Özdilek	Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	syalcinozdilek@gmail.com
Ukraine	Olesya Petrovych	Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture	petrovych.o@gmail.com
United Kingdom	Rhiannon Hudson-Jones	DEFRA/ International Species Conservation	Rhiannon.Hudson-jones@defra.gov.uk
United Kingdom	Rebecca Sexton	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	rebecca.sexton@jncc.gov.uk
UN			
CITES	Karen Gaynor	Scientific Support Officer	karen.gaynor@un.org
IGO			

ICES	Caroline Durif	Institute of Marine Research/ICES Working Group on Eel	caroline.durif@hi.no
Sargasso Sea Commission	David Freestone	Executive Secretary	davidacfreestone@gmail.com
Sargasso Sea Commission	Fae Sapsford	Marine Research Fellow and Communications Officer	fsapsford@sargassoseacommission.org
NGO/Academia			
Coalition Clean Baltic	Aimi Hamberg	Marine Policy Officer	aimi.hamberg@ccb.se
FishSec	Niki Sporrong	Senior Policy Officer & European eel Project Manager	niki.sporrong@fishsec.org
World Maritime University	Elnaz Barjandi	Programme and Operations Manager	elm@wmu.se
World Maritime University	Ronan Long	Director	rl@wmu.se
World Maritime University	Francis Neat	Professor	fn@wmu.se
World Maritime University	Vonintsoa Rafaly	Postdoctoral Fellow	vor@wmu.se
World Maritime University	Suriya N Sundararajan	PhD Candidate	w1015145@wmu.se
Invited Expert			
Zoological Society of London	Matt Gollock	Author of Draft Action Plan for the European Eel	matthew.gollock@zsl.org
Secretariat			
CMS	Melanie Virtue	Head of Aquatic Team	melanie.virtue@un.org
CMS	Andrea Pauly	Programme Officer	Andrea.pauly@un.org
CMS	Tine Lindberg-Roncari	Conference Services	tine.lindberg-roncari@un.org