

## MARINE ECOLOGY

# Eel population declining again

**The recovery of the eel population has stalled. Fewer adult eels made their way back to sea from the Netherlands during the period 2018-2020, due to the increase in commercial fishing. These conclusions were reached by Wageningen Marine Research in its evaluation of the Dutch eel management plan for the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality.**

The eel policy is designed to reduce eel mortality due to human activities and facilitate the migration of silver eels, adult eels that return to the Sargasso Sea to mate.

This policy, with measures such as a reduction in catches and the removal of barriers in waterways, led to an improvement in eel stocks from 2005 and a steady increase in the number of silver eels reaching the sea. However, the evaluation for 2018-2020 reveals

deterioration with a fall in silver eel numbers from 1460 tons to 970 tons. While the models have improved, these numbers are rough estimates based on limited catch and monitoring data.

Even so, the research team headed by Tessa van der Hammen calls the deterioration in the figures for the first time in 15 years 'worrying'. They blame it on 'an increase in commercial fishing in the IJsselmeer and Markermeer

lakes.' The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has been calling for a European ban on eel fishing for 20 years. But that recommendation was disregarded once again last December by the EU ministers in the Fisheries Council.

Improvements in the population of eels in the Netherlands and the migration of silver eels take a long time because the eel is long-lived. It is thought to take glass eels (elvers) one to three years to travel from the Sargasso Sea to the Dutch coast and swim up the rivers. Another three to 20 years are required for them to develop into silver eels and swim back out to sea.

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