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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

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Subject: Regulation on Atlantic and North Sea TACs and Quotas for 2018
- Draft Joint Declaration on strengthening the recovery for European eel

Delegations will find attached a Draft Joint Declaration on the above-mentioned subject in view of the Working Party of 23 November.

DRAFT

Joint Declaration on strengthening the recovery for European eel

The Commission and Member States,

Acknowledging that the stock of European eel is in critical condition, as confirmed again by ICES latest advice of 7 November 2017;

Taking note of the listing of European eel in CITES Appendix II and in CMS Appendix II;

Recognizing that urgent action is needed to ensure the recovery of the stock in all EU sea-basins and that concrete measures need to be in place as from 2018;

Considering that a prohibition of fisheries of eel in marine waters has been agreed in the context of the Regulation on Fishing opportunities for 2018;

Welcoming the GFCM decision to work on a management plan for European eel in the Mediterranean together with non EU States;

Understanding that the recovery of the stock requires measures also during the fresh-water part of the eel life-cycle;

Agree to strengthen the protection of the stock of European Eel

To this effect:

1. Member States will fully implement and further reinforce their national eel management plans by:
 - i) Decreasing fishing mortality during the freshwater part of the eel lifecycle by reducing commercial and recreational catches by at least 50% relative to their catches in 2017. This reduction is to be achieved gradually, initially by steps of 15% per year in the first two years over a 5-year period, from 1 January 2018;

- ii) Decreasing non-fisheries related anthropogenic mortality factors by at least 50% compared to the current level, for instance by putting in place structural measures to make rivers passable, improving river habitats, temporary switching-off of hydro-electric turbines and transportation of silver eels from inland waters to waters from which they can escape freely to the Sargasso Sea. This reduction is to be achieved gradually, initially by steps of 15% per year in the first two years over a 5-year period, from 1 January 2018.
2. Member States will review current restocking practices and commit to limit publicly funded restocking to habitats where commercial and recreational fisheries have been prohibited and where non-fisheries related mortality factors have been reduced in line with point 6.
3. Member States will use appropriate inspection and control mechanisms to fight against illegal eel fishing and illegal trade for eels and ensure compliance with the CITES ban of extra-European trade. This includes putting in place appropriate IT tools to ensure the traceability of eels at all stages, both when they are used for direct and indirect human consumption and when they are used for restocking purposes. The Commission will be monitoring the situation closely to assess whether progress has thus been achieved.
4. Member States will provide progress reports on the implementation of their eel management plans by June 2018, including in concrete information on the measures put in place to abide with their commitments under points 1-3. The Commission will provide a template for the reports to ensure the quality and comparability of the data provided.

The Commission will submit MS reports to an external review to verify the accuracy and appropriateness of the data provided and the methods used to calculate them and thus ensure a level playing field.

5. The Commission will launch an external evaluation of the Eel regulation early 2018 to assess its effectiveness and its contribution to the recovery of the stock of European eel, with a view to its possible revision.