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**PECHE 21**

**NOTE**

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from : Finnish delegation

to : Working Party on Internal Fisheries Policy

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No. Cion prop. : 13139/05 PECHE 203 - COM(2005) 472 final

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Subject : Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel

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Delegations will find attached written comments from the Finnish delegation on the subject mentioned above.

Ref: Establishing measures for the recovery of the European eel  
Working document DS 52/07 LIMITE, 24 January 2007

Subject: WRITTEN COMMENTS ON THE DOCUMENT BY FINLAND

The European Commission has prepared a draft Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel. A new working document No 52/07 has now been produced from that document. It puts forward provisions on Member States' obligations to draw up eel management plans. The plans must set out means of allowing the escapement to the sea from each river basin of at least 40 % of the eel biomass relative to the estimated size of the eel population when unaffected by human activity. If the management plan fails to produce results, the fishing season must be reduced by 50 %.

Eels are at present found naturally to some degree in the southern coastal regions of Finland. Because of obstacles to migration, young eels are hardly found upstream in river areas any more. The most recent observations are from 2001. However, there is a long tradition of restocking with eels in our country. In Finland this mainly involves the stocking of imported glass eels in inland or brackish waters on the coast. Eels fished in Finland are all nowadays the result of restocking.

Since the 1980s eel fishing has had no commercial significance. In recreational fishing long lines, small fykes, angling and torch fishing are used. Fishing concentrates on yellow and silver eel. Eel restocking is based on imports of glass eels; there is no commercial eel farming in Finland.

The problem issues are discussed in detail below.

(1) The scope of the proposal should cover in particular Community maritime waters and estuaries. The scope should also clearly stipulate that it covers only commercial fishing and not recreational fishing.

Fishing regulation can only cover maritime fishing vessels. Unregistered recreational fishing vessels operating in inland waters must not be included. The regulation of recreational fishing with catch reporting requirements and surveillance activity is not to be expected at Community level.

(2) The proposal assumes that management plans must achieve the target of 40 % of eels escaping to their spawning ground. This categorically cannot be considered justifiable as presented. There are sufficient glass eels entering the Community's inland waters only in the River Severn in the United Kingdom and in the major rivers that flow into the Bay of Biscay. However, owing to intensive sea fishing outside the Baltic there are not enough glass eels reaching the Baltic region. The proposal has not given sufficient attention to glass eel fishing and trade management.

In regenerating eel stocks it is necessary to concentrate first and foremost on restricting fishing for glass eels. Recovery measures should concentrate on protecting young individuals, which may be considered a general principle in restocking programmes. At present in the Community only 5 % of the total glass eel catch is destined for restocking activities. Most of it (95 %) goes into on-growing in aquaculture or directly for use as food. Nowadays, sufficiently large-scale preventive restocking activity is not even possible, because there are not enough glass eels available. As a result of strong demand the price is too high. To make restocking possible, restrictions will need to be placed on catching glass eels for food.

Private water owners in Finland have stocked our waters extensively with eels. The aim of such stocking is to have something to catch from these waters. There is access from some of these inland waters to the sea, and a certain number of eels does end up migrating from them. If the fishing season is shortened by half as proposed, this would probably put an end to restocking by private water proprietors. This in turn would only have a negative impact on eel stocks. Finland therefore feels that the measures are contradictory.

The whole act should concentrate on the points essential to the protection and recovery of the stock of European eel. For that reason regional differences and the chances of measures being successful as a result must be taken into account. The Baltic is remote in terms of glass eel migration and with declining stocks, even restricting fishing in this area will not achieve the right results.

Recovery measures must be targeted at extensive restocking for farming purposes and only significant portions of water basins should be included in the rules.

(3) The proposal starts from the principle that Member States must chart individual eel river basins which were suitable habitats for eels before there was human activity. Furthermore, in their management plans for river basins the Member States must put forward measures offering a high probability of ensuring escapement to the sea for 40 % of the numbers of silver eels estimated to migrate from those river basins prior to human intervention.

It may be argued that prior to human intervention nearly all of Finland's coastline and the rivers flowing into it were suitable habitats for eels. By this reasoning it would be necessary to put an end e.g. to the widespread use of hydro-electric power as an energy source in Finland in order to achieve the prescribed 40 % of silver eel numbers. Such structures in river basins used for power generation totally prevent the migration of eels in practice. The act is simply impossible to implement, and the needs of energy production were not taken into account when it was drawn up. Regional differences and hence the chances of recovery measures being successful must be taken into account in the rules.

