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NOTE

from: Swedish delegation

to: Working Party on Internal Fisheries Policy

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

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

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

On eel fishery in marine water – Swedish comments

The basic behaviour of glass-eel arriving to the continental shores of Europe is to aggregate at estuaries and subsequently move upstream and disperse in diverse freshwater habitats. The eel has a wide salinity tolerance however and some eel stay in the coastal zone and can spend their whole life in brackish or salt water. Those eels live in the littoral zone, in general at depths less than 10 m. The abundance decreases with distance from major river mouths. There may be a high predation by conger on European eel.

A major part of the production and fishery of the European eel takes place in brackish or saline water. At least 52 % of the total catch reported to ICES in 2004 was made in coastal water, if estuaries and coastal lagoons are included in the definition. This proportion is probably increasing with the declining recruitment and ongoing installation of barriers to upstream migration. Recent data from the Baltic shows that approximately 80 % of the eel leaving the Baltic have spent their whole life in saltwater.

Apart from the glass-eel fishery in estuaries, the fishery in coastal water takes place very close to the shores and in shallow water. Two kinds of fishery exist: A yellow eel fishery, mainly using baited pots, bottom longlines or small fykenets, and silver eel fishery using fixed fish traps or poundnets. The silver eel gears usually have a leader net set perpendicularly from the shore and can, depending on the bathymetry, extend more than 1 km out. There is (used to be) a near-shore trawl fishery for eel in the Netherlands and on the east-coast in the Baltic, with small specialised fine-meshed trawls.

No offshore eel fishery exists. Neither is there any by-catch of eel. For eels to be retained in a fishing-gear requires very small mesh size, typically less than 20 mm stretched mesh. Such gears are not used in other fisheries except industrial pelagic trawls that are unlikely to operate in eel habitats. There are occasional by-catches of migrating silver eel in offshore pelagic trawling, but the number is extremely low and this is more of a curiosity than a problem.