



Sustainable
Eel Group

Joint Statement

World Fish Migration Day

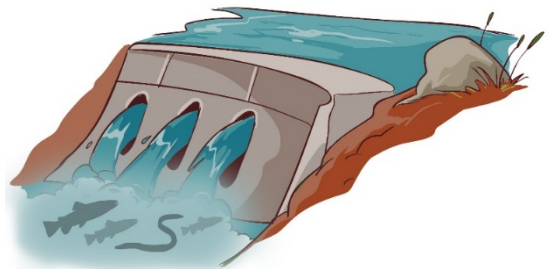


Eels killed by hydropower turbines during their natural downstream migration. Photo: Frode Kroglund

Fish need to migrate!

Animals across the globe fly, swim, walk or drift in their effort to find places to breed, feed or just a more hospitable climate. Often unseen, but of major importance for functioning freshwater ecosystems, fish migrate and use rivers as natural highways. But most of them are blocked. Roughly 1.3 million obstructions in Europe hinder fish, and many other freshwater species, from their natural migration. Imagine a sky full of nets preventing birds from traveling to and from their wintering grounds.

1.3 MILLION



Obstructions block migratory pathways for fish in European waters.



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Fish are suffering from blocked pathways

Millions of fish are killed each year on their natural migration. The majority of 25,000 hydroelectric power plants and the many 10,000's of pumping stations across Europe are not properly screened. Thousands of them are poorly designed, not even allowing fish to find their way around or through them.

Long-distance migratory species like the European eel, salmon and sturgeon are seriously depleted, or even close to the edge of extinction. Dozens of short-distance migratory species are also in alarming decline.

Like many other migratory fish stocks, European eel² and European sturgeon³ are in serious decline and therefore classified as "Critically Endangered" (CR) by the IUCN. Atlantic salmon, is regionally extinct or seriously depleted in many river systems across Europe.

Fishing bans are a blunt sword if other factors remain unattended

Stopping all fisheries is often communicated as the prime and most logical priority when dealing with declining migratory fish. It is certainly not. Fisheries need to be regulated and controlled but will not make a difference if other factors such as hydropower turbine-induced mortality, habitat loss and blocked migration pathways remain unattended. Long overdue retrofitting with state-of-the-art technology pumps and turbines could help to protect migratory fish. Goals of European Directives lack in implementation. Therefore, we propose a comprehensive approach that takes into consideration all anthropogenic impacts under an effective enforcement of the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC), the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC), and the Eel Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) 1100/2017). Fish are normally not visible. Blocked pathways lead to the creeping loss of fish stocks hidden from the public view.



Eels have been saved in one night from being killed in hydropower turbines during their natural downstream migration. State of the art fish protection for small hydropower has been available for many years. It is the will for implementation that is lacking. Photo: Dr. Guntram Ebel



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Small hydropower, small efficiency, massive negative impact

Small hydro-power plants are inefficient. 21,000 of the 25,000 hydroelectric power plants and pumping stations across Europe are small hydropower plants. These produce less than 1 % of the total electricity production in Europe. At the same time, they block 21,000 migration pathways and the access of upstream located habitats for trout, salmon, eels and other migratory fish. Small hydropower plants are responsible for a huge ecological disaster!

We need to take action

- **Enable fish to migrate!**
- **Remove old and obsolete dams from rivers**
- **Reduce the number of obstructions (1.3 million) that block migration pathways across Europe.**
- **Retrofit existing hydropower plants and pumping stations with state-of-the-art fish protection and fish passes**
- **Halt planning permissions for new small hydropower plants (less than 1 kW).**

Many migratory fish are critically endangered or locally extinct. It is time for a comprehensive approach that takes into consideration all anthropogenic impacts under an effective enforcement of the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) and the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) to save our natural heritage, cultures, traditions, and preserve aquatic biodiversity.

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