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Formas – Research Council for
Environment, Agricultural Sciences
and Spatial Planning
111 82 Stockholm

Remit to carry out an international evaluation of Sweden's management of the European eel

The Government's decision

The Government has tasked the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (Formas) with carrying out an international evaluation of Sweden's management of the European eel. Formas shall engage a number of researchers to form an independent scientific panel that will carry out the evaluation.

By 31 December 2024, Formas must submit a final report on the remit in both Swedish and English, including the related evaluation, to the Government Offices (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation with a copy to the Ministry of the Environment).

Reasons for the decision

Sweden's eel management consists mainly of its national eel management plan (Jo2008/3901). The plan is based on Council Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 of 18 September 2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel (the Eel Regulation), which sets a target for recovery of the eels. Management plans provide EU member states with far-reaching opportunities to adapt measures to local and national circumstances and challenges. Although this has meant flexibility, it also entails a weakness since the national plans have not been coordinated with other national management plans.

In light of recommendations from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Commission's conclusions, the Government considers that there is a need to evaluate Swedish measures in the management plan, in particular restocking, including trap and transport, non-fishery-related measures and reduced fish mortality. To enable an evaluation of the issues without links to Swedish or European eel management, an independent scientific panel must be engaged. Swedish

research on eels, conducted mainly by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), must also be highlighted in order to understand whether it has sufficiently captured the entire need for knowledge, and whether SLU's conclusions on the percentage of Swedish fishery catches of the migrating eel stock should be viewed in relation to ICES data. Researchers from Asia, Australia or North America can be relevant for this purpose.

Background

The Swedish management plan was approved by the Commission in September 2009. Both the national management plans and the Eel Regulation have been evaluated in the past. In 2013 ICES found that several countries did not report on the requested data (this did not include Sweden), so the contribution to the stock's recovery is impossible to estimate at the global level. This also means that it is difficult to evaluate the measures individually or in a broader context. The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management concluded in its 2015 report that the Swedish management plan does not need to be revised, but that the Government should consider revising the current eel regulation in light of the identified shortcomings in reporting, international coordination and the difficulty in determining the effects of national measures. The Commission carried out a second external evaluation of the Eel Regulation, which was published in February 2020 (Commission staff working document, executive summary of the evaluation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 of 18 September 2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel, SWD (2020) 36 final). In its summary, the Commission notes that the Eel Regulation remains relevant and in principle fit for purpose as an instrument for aiding the recovery of European eel stocks. It ensures that management can be applied at all stages of eel life and makes it possible to address both fishing and impacts not related to fisheries. At the same time, the evaluation concludes that the eel does not show signs of recovery despite long-term measures. Ireland alone, the only country to completely shut down both commercial and recreational eel fishing, has achieved the Eel Regulation's target of 40% escapement for silver eels.

The success of the Eel Regulation in ensuring the recovery of the European eel is still far from certain, since it is widely recognised that its recovery will take many decades. In this regard, the Commission notes that a greater focus on non-fishery measures is needed in order to implement the Eel Regulation.

Through the 2022 budget bill, 3 million kronor was allocated to appropriation 1:5, Environmental Research, for international evaluation initiatives for Sweden's eel management within expenditure area 20, General Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation. For 2023 and 2024, the appropriation is expected to be increased by a corresponding amount. The appropriation directions for the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency state that the funds must be disbursed to Formas.

On behalf of the Swedish Government

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Ministry of Finance/BA

Ministry of the Environment/NM