



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201  
703.842.0740 • www.asmf.org

---

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** American Eel Management Board  
**FROM:** American Eel Advisory Panel  
**DATE:** September 25, 2023  
**SUBJECT:** Advisory Panel Report

The Advisory Panel (AP) met virtually September 21, 2023 to review the recent benchmark stock assessment, receive an update on ongoing management actions, and provide comments on the fishery. Three AP members were in attendance on the call (see below). Staff recommends that jurisdictions revisit their current AP membership in order to improve attendance and participation.

**Participating AP Members:** Mari-Beth DeLucia (TNC, Chair), Mitch Feigenbaum (PA), Richard Stoughton (SC)

**Additional Attendees:** Phil Edwards (RIDEM)

Kristen Anstead provided an overview of the recent benchmark stock assessment for American eel. Caitlin Starks provided an update on the recently initiated Draft Addenda to address Maine's glass eel quota and consider changes to the yellow eel coastwide catch limit. Comments on these topics as well as general comments provided by the advisors are summarized below.

### Stock Assessment

Mitch Feigenbaum commented that he thinks the stock assessment results are heavily driven by fishery-dependent data, so the low catches in recent years could be influencing the results that are indicating low abundance of the population. Richard Stoughton commented that he thinks there is not enough data to call the stock "depleted."

Mari-Beth DeLucia commented that she remembers when the glass eel monitoring started, and expected that in 20 years the data would be useful to the stock assessment. However that does not seem to be the case. She suggested that young-of-year (YOY) surveys focus more on quality over quantity, and that states could combine resources on a few index sites where there is life cycle monitoring. Kristen noted that there are ongoing discussions with Canada and Europe to develop recommendations on where to focus time and resources on surveys.

Mitch commented that he agrees with the recommendation that biological sampling of the YOY surveys may not be necessary, but he still thinks the YOY surveys are very important for trend

M23-078

analysis. Survey results that have “no significant trend” are still important and indicative of stability. The Fish and Wildlife Service’s position is that recruitment indices are the best indicator of overall reproductive health of species. Variability with no trend is still telling information. If we know certain YOY surveys are not reliable, then those should be improved, and maybe we should narrow down the YOY surveys to focus on the ones of better quality. The Technical Committee could evaluate them to identify any that are not meaningful. He also suggested that genetic work could be done to look into the genetic diversity of the stock, which could give a better picture of how many reproductive eels there are.

#### Draft Addenda

Mitch Feigenbaum suggested that the yellow eel addendum should include an option for no change. Status quo seems effective, and they should be able to keep fishing at these historically low levels. He feels that catch is not going to increase because there is nothing to drive it up with the change in markets being driven by eel farms.

#### General Comments

Advisors noted that the current makeup of the AP seems to be fairly inadequate to present opinions or insights on any of the ongoing issues, given that only two commercial fishermen were on the call. It seems that AP participation has been almost nonexistent for the last three or four years.

They emphasized that the Board should know the AP is only lightly functioning, and the states may want to look at their AP membership to get more participation. The reason for low participation could be that the yellow eel fishery in the US has been reduced to almost nothing. Mitch Feigenbaum commented that this reduction is due to eel farms, which have changed the dynamics for eel markets. Now, most of the eel supply for consumption is being provided by these farms. Worldwide consumption of eel seems to be steady, but the amount produced by wild fisheries is minimal. He added that four years ago, ASFMC responding to the previous stock status determination by imposing a significant coastwide cap that would trigger management if it were exceeded. At the time, the industry expressed concerns that if catches are good and they hit the cap, then they might be punished. But if they fish under the cap, then the assessment is citing those lower catches as evidence of low abundance. Without efforts by the SAS to better understand CPUE and other FI data, he feels they are not getting a fair stock assessment.

Mitch also commented that the price of eels in the worldwide market has gone up over last five to six years, and even more so with inflation. He thinks the low harvests of last five years have no relationship to eel abundance. Rather, the amount of fishing has decreased. The yellow eel fishery has been moribund for a number of years now.

The advisors discussed that the AP Chair role has not changed hands in over six years. They would like to see a new AP Chair be elected. Staff acknowledged this, but noted that the lack of participation is a challenge.