



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** American Eel Management Board  
**FROM:** American Eel Technical Committee & Stock Assessment Subcommittee  
**DATE:** April 20, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Review of Florida Young of Year Survey

At its October 2025 meeting, the American Eel Board (Board) tasked the Technical Committee (TC) with evaluating the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel (YOY) survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and reporting back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

After discussing the YOY survey and an alternative electrofishing survey presented by Florida, the TC also asked the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) to provide input on 1) the significance of the Florida YOY survey for the stock assessment; and 2) evaluation of the Florida electrofishing survey, including why it was not considered for use in the last assessment and potential for use in future assessments.

This memo summarizes the input provided by the TC and SAS on the FL YOY survey and possible alternatives for assessing recruitment trends. Summaries from previous TC meetings on this issue are attached for background and additional detail on the Committee discussions.

### *1. Utility of the FL YOY Survey for the Stock Assessment*

The TC had some concerns about potentially losing this survey as it is the most southern survey along the Atlantic coast and because the survey performed well in the power analysis during the last benchmark assessment. Additionally, the TC discussed that low catches may highlight population trends in that sampling area rather than poor performance of that survey. However, other TC members noted the high cost of the survey and recognized the difficulty in maintaining a survey that isn't producing catch. The TC expressed concern with discontinuing the YOY survey without gaining any other information.

The SAS discussed the utility of the FL YOY survey for future stock assessments. The SAS noted that although the FL YOY survey had relatively high power compared to other surveys, power analyses can be misleading because it is likely picking up on monotonic trends through time, rather than true observed recruitment trends. Additionally, there were some concerns with the FL YOY survey methodology. This survey is the only YOY survey that uses dip nets (rather than fyke nets or other sampling gears) which requires different effort and is therefore an outlier compared to other YOY surveys. Additionally, the FL YOY survey showed poor correlation between surveys (YOY and adult) and, when significant correlation was observed, these were

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not geographically relevant (i.e., neighboring states) and instead were fairly random. Finally, Florida noted significant changes in lake management related to water quality, stormwater, and waterfowl priorities at the Guana River site, which may impact catchability or habitat conditions and may not be reflective of true recruitment trends across the state. The SAS noted that the decline in the YOY index could reflect changes in catchability rather than changes in the population, which would be enough justification to drop surveys from stock assessments for other species.

Overall, the SAS did not feel that losing the FL YOY survey would be detrimental for future analysis due to management concerns and the limited signals it gives for population trends. However, the SAS noted that recruitment surveys could serve as a warning signal of stock-wide recruitment failure. While losing a single survey may not impact the assessment extensively, the loss of more YOY surveys could have negative consequences in the future because the assessment would not be able to catch early warning signs of coast-wide recruitment failure. The SAS also noted that the YOY surveys have only been conducted while the stock has been in a depleted state, so there is little information on YOY indices under good stock conditions. Therefore, it is hard to fully quantify the utility of the YOY surveys at this time.

## *2. Utility of the FL YOY Survey for Management*

The FL YOY Survey is not used to determine any management measures. Florida does not have any glass eel harvest, and the yellow eel fishery is not limited by state-specific quotas, but rather a coastwide harvest cap for yellow eel is imposed (Addendum VII). The current cap is 518,281 pounds and is established using  $I_{TARGET}$ , an index-based method that provides management advice based on yellow eel abundance indices and catch information, as well as management goals specified by the Board. Florida's yellow eel landings have averaged about 1.2% of the coastwide total from 2020-2024.

## *3. Evaluation of FL Electrofishing Survey for Assessing Recruitment Trends*

To evaluate whether the FL electrofishing data could be used as suggested by FL, the TC agreed that it would be helpful to ask for input from the SAS. The SAS requested data from FL including indices of abundance, raw sampling data, age data, and other methodological descriptions. FL provided all components of the data request in March 2026.

The SAS discussed the use of the FL Electrofishing survey in past assessments and evaluated its potential use in future assessments. The SAS noted that during the 2022 benchmark, there were questions surrounding the methodology of the FL electrofishing survey including whether there were changes to the protocol over time and which river systems were included. FL noted that prior requests included data from all river systems on the east and west coasts of FL, that were collected using multiple gears and sampling designs. However, the 2026 data request for the SAS only included systems in the St. Johns River Basin that are part of a standardized long-term monitoring program. The SAS noted that the survey was well designed and appreciated seeing abundance trends in multiple river and lake systems. The SAS noted that these indices could be combined in the future to document a single trend for FL. The SAS also noted that age data is useful to track recruitment through the population, but it may not be a priority unless

the stock assessment moves to an age structured model, which is unlikely. The SAS recommended that FL continue to collect age data as they have the capacity to do so. The SAS recommended that the FL electrofishing survey be brought forward in the next benchmark assessment for consideration.

4. *Additional Comments*

The TC raised concerns about the implications of coastwide monitoring requirements if the TC decided to roll back a survey in one state. The SAS shared these concerns and noted that it was difficult to evaluate one YOY survey without considering all of the YOY surveys at the same time. An American eel stock assessment update is scheduled for 2027, which the SAS will begin efforts on later this year. While the YOY surveys are not currently considered in the eel assessment to inform management decisions, as part of the update process, the SAS plans to describe the utility of all of the YOY surveys for their use in future stock assessments. An approximate timeline of the stock assessment update is included below.

Table 1. Approximate 2027 American Eel Assessment Update Timeline

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
2026 Compliance Report Submission Deadline	September 1, 2026
TC planning call	Fall 2026
2025 Data Submission Deadline	October-November 2026
TC/SAS call to review data submission, assign tasks	October-November 2026
SAS kick off call	December 2026
Model runs complete	July 2027
Rough draft of assessment report complete	August 1, 2027
SAS call to review/approve draft assessment report	August, 2027
Draft assessment report distributed to the TC	September 2027
TC call to review/approve draft assessment report	September 2027
Final assessment report to Board materials	October 2027
Assessment update presented to Board	October 2027