

Responding to Unwarranted “Red Listing” by IUCN, American Eel Sustainability Association Sets the Record Straight on American Eel

The American Eel Sustainability Association (AESA), a leader in the promotion of responsible fishery management and habitat protection for the American eel, released a statement on stock status for the species today in response to a recent designation published by an international environmental organization. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) added the American eel to its “Red List,” alleging the species to be threatened by extinction, a categorization that contradicts the 2007 finding of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Using the best available science for the species, AESA addresses these matters in their December response to the IUCN.

In adding American eel to its “Red List” of species it deems “threatened,” IUCN’s volunteer authors noted they were “on the fence” between listing the species as “threatened” or applying the lesser status of “vulnerable” due to several positive trends in eel populations. In stark contrast, authorities from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that “there is no evidence of a sustained downward trend” in the stock.

AESA has carefully studied key reports on the status of American eels by regional and national authorities in both the United States and Canada. The body of evidence in the stock science indicates that adult American eel numbers may be low compared to historic and prehistoric levels, but that the breeding population has been sufficient to produce new recruits in stable or growing numbers going back several decades.

Using the data found in various reports, AESA has compiled a comprehensive response to the IUCN’s recent listing, and submitted these materials directly to the organization. The IUCN has acknowledged receipt of AESA’s response, noting that the organization takes the Association’s concerns seriously and will thoroughly consider its position. AESA now awaits a formal response from IUCN.

While identifying and correcting misleading aspects of the IUCN report on American eel, AESA remains committed to working with all responsible government agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure sustainable eel fisheries management in the United States and Canada.

This week, AESA will further address these issues when they present on American eel management, regulation, and stock assessments at the Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Expo in Portland, Maine. Other organizations will discuss strategies for developing eel aquaculture in North America at that event.

By providing the industry and interested parties with essential information and fostering innovative partnerships, AESA provides science-based solutions to achieving eel sustainability. AESA works collaboratively with partners in U.S. government agencies, foreign government fisheries management departments, private companies, international organizations, fishermen, and individual members of the public.