

Joint Press Release

July 27th, 2023

On the occasion of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Informal Consultation on International Cooperation for Conservation and Management of Japanese Eel Stock and Other Relevant Eel Species (Informal Consultation),

Fisheries Management and Scientific Research Departments of the People's Republic of China, the Fisheries Agency of Japan, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea and the Fisheries Agency of Chinese Taipei (hereinafter referred to as “Participants”),

Recalling that People’s Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Chinese Taipei are all Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economies;

Recognizing that the 2014 Joint Statement issued at the Seventh Meeting serves as a stepping stone towards further cooperation in the East Asian region,

Recalling every effort towards sustainable use of eel species after 2014 including the limit on eel seeds input into aquaculture ponds and proposal on the establishment of the Alliance for Sustainable Eel Aquaculture (ASEA),

Noting the decisions 19.218 to 19.221 of the 19th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES COP19),

Noting also the eel relevant documents (AC32 Sum.2) adopted at the 32nd Meeting of CITES Animal Committee (AC32),

Sharing the view on importance of cooperating towards the 77th meeting of CITES Standing Committee (SC77), the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee (AC33) and the 20th Meetings of CITES COP,

Mindful that Participants are willing to cooperate under the Framework of APEC Ocean and Fishery Working Group (OFWG);

Have reaffirmed the following common views:

(1) Participants have cooperated on the conservation and management measures of Japanese eel stock and other relevant eel species as follows:

- reviewed input, output and trade statistics of glass eels during the season 2022-2023 and noted input amount of glass eels of Japanese eel into aquaculture ponds in all Participants was lower than the upper limit stated in the 2014 Joint Statement;
- shared information on international and domestic circumstances related to eel species;
- reviewed and endorsed the Summary Report of the 2nd Scientific Meeting on Japanese Eel and Other Relevant Eels (29th-30th May, 2023; hereafter referred to as “the 2nd Scientific Meeting”), including the Draft Roadmap for Scientific Activities and collaborative Research on Japanese eel; and adopted the Terms of Reference for Task Team 1 & 2 of Scientific Activities and Collaborative Research on Japanese Eel Established under the Scientific Meeting.
- shared information on the domestic conservation and management measures that each Participant has taken since 2014 joint statement as follows;

China:

China calls on all localities to further strengthen the export management of glass eel, strengthen law enforcement and supervision, strengthen industry self-discipline, severely crack down on the smuggling of glass eel, and optimize the process and management system of international trade of glass eel. The Yangtze River Estuary and the Yangtze River Basin are the most important producing areas of glass eel in China. In order to conserve the glass eel and other fisheries resources in the Yangtze River, from January 1, 2021, the issuance of special fishing licenses for glass eel in the waters within the fishing ban management area of Yangtze River has been ceased. At the same time, it is stipulated that in the fishable waters, the policies had been issued to limit the scale of eel fry fishing, such as Zhejiang stipulates that the total amount of eel fry fishing should be controlled, and the scale of fishing should not exceed that of the previous year. Shanghai stipulates the number of special fishing licenses for glass eel in 2022 shall not exceed that of 2021, the number of net gear per license shall not exceed 20, and the number of net openings per net gear shall not exceed 1. Besides, China has carried out the stock enhancement and release of Japanese eel. The above measures will help restore the number of parent eel populations and wild glass eel resources, and promote the sustainable development of eel industry.

Japan:

Catch of glass eels is subject to licenses to be issued by the prefectural governments and duration of fishing season is limited. Catch of adult eels using certain fishing gears is subject to licenses to be issued by the prefectural governments. Variety of additional measures, such as gear restriction, upper limit of harvest for individual and time closure, have been introduced and implemented for catch of both glass and adult eels considering unique situation in each Prefecture. In June 2015, the licensing

system was introduced to eel aquaculture, under the Inland Water Fishery Promotion Act. The amount of initial input of eel seeds is restricted by eel species and allocated for each individual farmer under this Act. In April 2020, the total input of eel seeds in Japan getting close to the upper limit, the Fisheries Agency of Japan directed prefectural governments to halt the catch of glass eels. Since 2006, continuous efforts have been made for the purpose of the creation and conservation of a favorable riverine environment, based on the concept of “Nature-oriented river works” representing conservation and regeneration of the environment as habitat, growing and spawning grounds that rivers intrinsically have, which has become a basic idea for management of river.

The number of prefectures which prohibit the catch of silver eel is increasing, bearing in mind the resolution taken by National Federation of Inland Waters Fishing Ground Management Commissions and National Federation of Inland water Fisheries Cooperatives in 2018 take measures for conservation of silver eels in all prefectures as soon as possible. In 2019, the Fisheries Agency of Japan launched a project in order to improve a traceability of Japanese eel from a catch of glass eel through to an input into aquaculture pond as well as a research project including resource trend analysis and spawning migration tracking with the goal of future development of a Japanese eel stock assessment. In April 2022, Japan held the 1st Scientific Meeting with attendance of China, Korea, and Chinese Taipei, inviting European eel experts from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and Zoological Society of London (ZSL). In accordance with the amendment of the Fishery Act in December 2020, the government of Japan considerably strengthened the penal provisions in order to prevent poaching by giving great disadvantage to offenders. After December 2023, the penalty for catching glass eels without a fishing permit will be an imprisonment of up to 3 years or a fine of not more than 30 million Japanese yen. In December 2020, Act on Ensuring the Proper Domestic Distribution and Importation of Specified Aquatic Animals and Plants was enacted to prevent the distribution of illegally harvested, unregulated and unreported aquatic animals and plants by requiring the communication of handling information among distributors and traders, the preparation and preservation of transaction records, and the attachment of documents attesting that the product was harvested legally when it is imported or exported. The distribution of domestically harvested glass eel will also be subject to the obligations under this law from December 2025. Japan implements the Regulations on Export Approvals for Glass Eels to promote the sustainable use of eel species under international cooperation. In accordance with the Regulations, before an export approval, the Fisheries Agency of Japan confirms appropriateness of the export of glass eels for conservation and management of eel species, including all international agreements and arrangements that Japan has participated in are fully complied.

Republic of Korea:

Time closure and size limit of catch were introduced by the government in January 2017 and have been in force since July 2017 for the management of eel stocks. Eel fishery is prohibited from 1 October to 31 March in the following year. And the catch of eels between 15cm and 45cm is prohibited

all year long. Korea also changed the administrative system for eel aquaculture operation from the “reporting system” to a “permission system.” The relevant legislation that provided a legal background for this change was established on August 27, 2019 and took effect as from August 28, 2020.

In 2018, Korea developed and installed “fishway (pathway or ladders)” for eels in some of the artificial structures such as estuary banks and sea walls which prevent or block the natural migration of eels, in order to provide more favorable environments to eels. These pathways have been in good use ever since. Korea plans to install additional fish ladders in the mid-to-long term. Korea will continue this research or initiative in 2023 and remains committed to exploring possible conservation and management options for eels. The medium to long-term plans also include the improvements in relevant systems and designation of specialized research agencies so that eel stock assessments can be undertaken nation-wide, in order to conserve and protect the Japanese eel stock.

Chinese Taipei:

With regard to the glass eel fishing, although the traditional fishing season for glass eel is from October to April, glass eel fishing is only permitted from November to February in accordance with the 2013 Regulations on the Restricted Fishing Seasons for Elvers, subject to adjustment based on annual migrant pattern and/or for scientific purposes. A license system has also been introduced to vessels fishing for glass eel.

With a view to protect the habitats of eels, the catch of young and adult eels is managed by local governments, and the fishing for eels has been prohibited in 41 rivers. For example, Yilan County, the traditional major glass eel harvest region, has prohibited the catch of young and adult eels in all its rivers so as to conserve eel species.

As for the export control, based on the Foreign Trade Act and the regulations established pursuant to this Act, export of glass eels is prohibited from November to March.

With regard to the control of eel farming activities, the Regulations for Input Management of Eel Aquaculture has been promulgated since November 2014 and amended as appropriate to enhance the control of eel farming activities. As per these Regulations, the Fisheries Agency will review the relevant requirements and announce the input amount of glass eels annually, and each eel farmer is subject to the control and management of license system and individual input limit. For Japanese eel and other relevant eel species, the total upper limit for glass eel input are both set at 10 metric tons per year.

For stock enhancement, the release of Japanese eel larvae was from the confiscated glass eels to rivers, and the part of those eels was also used for scientific research.

(2) Participants renewed their commitments to make the utmost efforts as follows;_

- to further strengthen conservation and management measures of Japanese eel stock and other relevant eel species and closely work together in this regard;

- to promote and collaborate on scientific research on Japanese eel in line with Terms of References for Task Team 1 & 2 of Scientific Activities and Collaborative Research on Japanese Eel Established under the Scientific Meeting;
- to hold the 3rd Scientific Meeting in 2024 spring season, in order to share scientific knowledge and experience, as well as to provide scientific advice for conservation and management measures of the species;
- to adopt either of the following measure(s), but not limited to one measure if situation allows: to enhance conservation on key habitat of Japanese eel and/or to decrease the capture and utilization of wild Japanese eel;
- to restrict initial input of glass eels and eel fries of Japanese eel taken from the wild into aquaculture ponds in 2023-2024 input season up to 80% of that of the 2013-2014 input season;
- to take every possible measure not to increase the amount of initial input of seeds of eel species other than Japanese eels from the level stated in the 2014 Joint Statement;
- to consider complementary measures intersessionally for the discussion and the adoption at the next Informal Consultation, possibly taking into account scientific advice from the Scientific Meeting;
- to make continued efforts individually and/or jointly to improve traceability and transparency in domestic and international eel trade, taking into consideration of the outcomes of the CITES-COP 19 and AC32;
- to closely cooperate with other international instruments;
- to consider possible establishment of a legally binding framework, such as regional or subregional fisheries management organization or arrangement;
- to further cooperate towards SC77, AC33, CITES-COP20; and
- to encourage voluntary actions to be taken by the private sector in line with the above-mentioned measures.

Attachment:

- Eel Statistics on catch and input of glass eels and trade of any stages of eels compiled from the Standard Working Formats for statistics of glass eel, eel fry and adult eel on each stage, and
- Summary table of conservation and management measures for eels.