



Sustainable
Eel Group

The Sustainable *Eel* Group

**Monitoring, Evaluation
and Learning System**

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

Versions Issued

Version No.	Date	Description of Amendment	Approved by
1.0	1 July 2018	Initial	SEG Board
1.1	23 October 2018	Amendments following comment at initial ISEAL assessment, substantively to sections 7. and 8.	SEG Board
2.0	16 November 2023	Upgrade to align with revision of SEG Standard and ISEAL Code Compliance in 2023. Renumbered 302 to 301	SEG Board
2.1	1 November 2024	Change to registered address	A.Kerr, Chair of SEG Board
2.2	4 November 2024	Addition in 6.5 – stakeholder engagement about unintended effects.	A.Kerr, Chair of SEG Board

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Version 2.2
4 November 2024

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1. Purpose

This document describes the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system for the Sustainable Eel Group (SEG).

The MEL system is based on SEG's [009 Theory of Change](#) (which should be referred to alongside this document) and defines the short to long term outcomes and impacts that are expected from implementing SEG's strategies, including the SEG standard. It includes how those and key assumptions are and will be measured and will provide learning feedback for improving our strategies.

The MEL system also helps to demonstrate to stakeholders the changes intended by SEG and how SEG contributes to stated impacts.

2. Applicability and responsibility

This system is for SEG use. A summary version, a public statement, is published on our website in the page SEG Standard System on our website at: <https://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/the-seg-standard-system/> for transparency and public scrutiny. Those using and applying it are responsible for ensuring they use the latest version.

3. The Sustainable Eel Group - our purpose

The European eel population has declined significantly over the past century, and particularly during the period 1980 – 2010. It was once much more common and widely spread across its range from North Africa, through Europe and up to Scandinavia, and supported fishing, associated trade and livelihoods.

The reduced population is a risk to the species itself, wildlife and ecosystems and the socio-economics of communities that fish for, trade in and eat eel.

Our primary purpose is for the recovery of the European eel, with multiple benefits to the ecosystems, communities, traditions and economies that rely on it.

The Sustainable Eel Group (SEG) is the leading international collaboration of scientists, conservation groups, the commercial sector and advisors, dedicated to the recovery of the European eel. We are a not-for-profit, non-government organisation (NGO), with offices in Brussels and the United Kingdom and with collaborators from across Europe and beyond. Our influence must be Europe-wide to help the European eel, which is a single, mixed, genetically similar, panmictic stock.

Our Vision (or 'statement of change'):

Biologically safe wild eel populations, distributed throughout their natural range, fulfilling their role in the aquatic environment, recovering in line with the protection targeted by the EC Eel Regulation.

Our Mission:

To provide the respected leadership alliance that enables and promotes the joined-up conservation and management of the eel in the Member States of Europe and across the eel's range, linking all interests in an open and effective process to achieve SEG's Vision.

These are explained in more detail, with the strategies designed to achieve them, in our [Theory of Change](#).

Our work and strategies are designed to support the recovery of the European eel, and the European Commission's 'Eel Regulation ([Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1100/2007](#)). The primary objective of this Regulation is, as described in Article 1, *'the protection and sustainable use of the stock of European eel'*.

The SEG standard, one of our principal strategies, has been developed and designed as a code of conduct for best practice in the commercial eel sector, to support the recovery of the European eel and to support the objectives of the Eel Regulation.

4. MEL system requirements

4.1 Scope and boundaries of the MEL system

Aims and objectives

The overarching framework of the scope of SEG is captured in the Theory of Change and 'measuring the change' is described in section 4. This MEL system expands on that. This framework supports the following **sustainability impacts in support of our statement of change:**

Sustainability Impacts (explained in more detail in the 302 MEL Plan):

Social

- Greater engagement of all stakeholders interested in the European eel
- Illegal eel trade is minimised (ultimate goal is 0%)
- An increasing proportion (ultimate goal 100%), of eel fishing, trade and consumption demonstrates its commitment to protection and sustainable use by meeting the SEG standard
- The Sustainable Eel Group is a successful advocate of eel protection, sustainable use and recovery with governments and stakeholders

Environmental

- Protection for the European eel achieves the target of 40% survival
- Barriers to migration are removed or adequately mitigated, initially to meet the 25,000km river target in the [Swimways Network](#) by 2030
- Wetland habitats are restored to increase the quantity, quality and connectivity of the aquatic environment for eels

Economic

- The damaging effects of water operations* to eel populations are minimised,
- The livelihoods of those that fish and trade responsibly in eel are maintained

* pumping, navigation, flood management, hydropower, pollution discharges etc.

Assumptions and methodologies for measuring and evaluating these Sustainability Impacts are described in more detail in our [302 MEL Plan](#).

Geographical scope

Although the European eel has a lifecycle across continents, seas and the Atlantic Ocean, SEG's MEL system will be limited to its coastal and freshwater range at this stage. This is where data and information are best known and where, via the European Commission and our network, our activities have influence.

SEG is also sharing best practice and information with those involved with other Anguillid eel species around the world, in particular, the east coast American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), and in Asia, the Japanese eel (*Anguilla japonica*). As a small organisation, there are no current plans to extend the M&E system to those species and places, though authorities there might adapt the SEG system for future use. A pilot project, published in 2023, has tested the feasibility of the adaptation of the SEG standard in North America, and we await the demand and reactions of stakeholder there to see if there will be any uptake.

4.2 Resources

SEG has identified and allocated the following resources to implement and maintain a streamlined and robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system.

4.2.1 Personnel

SEG Board

The SEG Board provides direction, support, decision making and allocation of resources to the development and maintenance of the SEG Standard System. Apart from the Director of Conservation Operations (see below) some Board members provide more direct support and input to the MEL system than others.

Total estimated time spent per other Board members on MEL are:

Chairman: 20 days; Director of Science: 20 days; other Board members (x4 @ 5 days each) = 20 days; **total = 60 days**.

Director of Conservation Operations (David Bunt)

This role and person has been the primary author and project manager for development and implementation of the SEG standard and supporting materials. The Director of Conservation Operations is also a member of the SEG Board, and currently includes the role of SEG Standard System Manager, being responsible for the content, functioning, support and improvement of the SEG Standard System. David has a BSc. in Environmental Biology, MSc. in Aquatic Resource Management and is a Chartered Environmentalist. He has worked in fisheries, environmental and business management since 1987. His estimated time allocation and budget to the System is 2.5 days per week, increasing to 3.5 days in 2024, comprising: Operations: 1 day, MEL: 1 day; Assurance: 1 day; Standard: ½ day.

Per year = Operations: 48 days, **MEL: 48 days**; Assurance: 48 days; Standard: 24 days.

Data and Communications Officer (Toby Mills)

SEG employs a Data and Communications Officer for 2 days per week: 1 day for communications (website edits, news, social media) and 1 day (increasing to 1.5 days in 2024) for data (collation, maintenance of databases, reporting). Toby has a BA in Fine Art and a MSc. in Biodiversity and Taxonomy.

Per year = Communications: 48 days, **MEL: 62 days.**

External Support

As a small organisation, SEG periodically uses external consultants for specific expertise. There has been extensive support from ISEAL experienced consultants, for example, OneWorldStandards (Matthew Wenban-Smith), Liseed Consulting (Aimee Russillo), Mike Read Associates, KB West Consulting. Outside of development phases (e.g. 2018, 2023) SEG uses approx. **5 days** external support per year on MEL.

Total resource planned for MEL 2024 onwards: 175 days per year.

4.2.2 Funding

The development of the SEG standard and supporting materials was originally funded in 2017/2018 50% by SEG and 50% from a European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) grant. In 2023 the funding is 100% by SEG.

The SEG Board agreed at its meeting on 16 November 2023 to allocate sufficient budget for these staff, roles and services for at least the next three years, securing the resources for building and maintaining the SEG MEL system based on identified needs. As a small organization, SEG currently operates with a very lean MEL system, building on its Excel based databases for data collection and management. SEG staff will be responsible for managing and overseeing the data collection, quality control checks and analysis. As we have grown our system in 2023, these simple databases will grow, and some additional staff time only needed – no costs besides staff time (for example specialist IT development) are required at this stage. As the system develops, we will review annually whether a more elaborate system is required to meet the MEL needs.

If SEG personnel with these roles leave SEG, new recruits or other contacts will be allocated to undertake these roles, and / or consultants with experience of ISEAL M&E systems will be appointed.

4.2.3 Roles, responsibilities and data protocols

The roles and responsibilities of the MEL system staff are described in more detail. Their qualifications and background are listed in 4.2.1.

Director of Conservation Operations (David Bunt)

- This Board role has overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the MEL system. This includes:
 - Design and development of the system
 - Gaining input and approval from the SEG Board
 - Ensuring the SEG Board is aware of its responsibilities towards the MEL System
 - Gaining input from stakeholders
 - Ensuring the resources (people and funding) are in place for to measure and report progress
 - Evaluating data and information for reporting
 - Reviewing progress reports before publication
 - by October each year,

- Evaluating all the data collected for accuracy, timeliness, etc., and against the SEG MEL Plan baselines and targets.
- Providing an internal evaluation report based on this, and on the impact evaluation, and on assessment of changes made in the previous year, for the SEG Board to consider by XX each year.

Data Officer (Toby Mills)

- This role has responsibility for collating data and reporting progress with the M&E system. This includes:
 - Collating data and information from different sources
 - Checking or seeking assurance for their accuracy
 - Evaluating data for reporting
 - Preparing reports for review
 - Publishing reports to the SEG website
 - by October each year, for collecting data from the stated sources for the all indicators, in conformity with the SEG data management plan and SEG data inventory.

SEG Board (see SEG [website](#))

- The SEG Board has responsibility for making executive decisions on behalf of the Sustainable Eel Group. With regards to the MEL system it has responsibility to:
 - Appointing a Board member with overall responsibility for the MEL System.
 - Decide the content of the M&E system, e.g. what performance indicators will be measured
 - Approve the annual performance monitoring reports for publication
 - Approve changes to the system, reporting and interventions
 - Prepare any responses to external evaluations
 - Evaluation and quality assurance of reports
 - Conduct annual System Management Reviews to understand the learning informed by the system and to implement and assess the effects of changes made (improvements).
 - by January each year, for:
 - Reviewing the internal evaluation report and impact evaluation.
 - Ensuring that consequent learning and changes are documented.
 - Providing clear direction on changes.
 - Ensuring necessary resources for the effective operation of the MEL system.

4.3 Data confidentiality and use

The data and information required for the MEL system will come directly from publically available sources, clients, the Compliance Assessment Bodies (CABs), from SEG initiated sector surveys and commissioned external evaluation reports.

SEG has identified the sources for the current scope of MEL data and identified strategies for use within the MEL system. Many of the data sources are public and do not have any legal barriers or issues in use. For certification client data, SEG incorporates contractual reporting requirements through the CABs. The SEG initiated data collection methods (e.g. surveys) include use and confidentiality clauses.

SEG staff and CABS will sometimes be in possession of commercially sensitive data and information from individual businesses. Data and information security is described in the [011 Data Management System](#).

For any new data, SEG will analyse any legal issues / barriers prior to collecting and using the data.

To summarise how information will be securely handled:

- When seeking information from clients they shall be advised that it will be treated according to our Data Security Policy in the [011 Data Management System](#) (with a link to the policy provided),
- All data on individual clients shall be treated as confidential ('commercial in confidence'),
- Data shall be held in password protected folders on the SEG Cloud based 'P' drive, with access only by limited SEG personnel with password protected log-ins to access them,
- Permission shall be sought to publish any data or information that is specific to the client. For example, SEG will publish client audit reports, but as they often contain commercially sensitive information, SEG, via the CAB, shall agree with the client what information can remain and what should be removed for publication.

Data from clients will be used to aggregate into total figures to monitor and report trends across the sector, e.g. *The number and % of businesses in each part of the sector achieving the SEG standard*. It will not be possible from those reports to identify data from individuals.

5. Stakeholder engagement

5.1 Stakeholder identification

A stakeholder mapping exercise was undertaken and documented in 2016 and updated in 2023 in document [008 SEG Stakeholder Analysis](#). This lists the stakeholders and their representation across the key stakeholder categories for the shared goal of healthy wild eel populations.

The stakeholder list is maintained in an Excel spreadsheet, reference 007 SEG Stakeholder List (not published due to data confidentiality). It currently has over 900 contacts, representing wide and diverse interests in the European eel.

5.2 Stakeholder engagement

This list is used to keep those 900 stakeholders informed by direct email about news and progress with SEG activities. It was used to consult on the review of the SEG standard in 2017 and in 2023. In June 2017 a workshop in London was used to consult on the standard in person. Part of that workshop focused on the MEL elements to solicit and gather input and feedback. In 2023 we held meetings with targeted, previously under-represented stakeholders to consult on the revision of the SEF standard, as outlined in [012 Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#), for example Dutch and Danish yellow eel fishers, French glass eel fishers.

The standard contained the proposed measures and targets for the MEL system related to the standard itself, so those 900 stakeholders were consulted on that over three consultation periods in 2023. SEG received a number of comments in relation to those measures and they will be published on the SEG website in December 2023. This version of the MEL System was approved by the SEG Board on 16 November 2023, but SEG recognises that the system will continue to evolve and be informed by stakeholder engagement. Indeed, the next 3-month consultation process is due to take place December 2023 – February 2024.

As part of the continuous improvement process, feedback from stakeholders has been and will be sought on reports published in order to consider how improvements to the MEL system shall be made. Examples of this are in the 2023 SEG System Management Review.

5.3 Contact point for submission of comments or complaints about MEL

Stakeholders can send comments directly to M&E staff via email, or answer surveys designed to obtain feedback on specific reports.

For comments about the SEG MEL system, stakeholders can contact: standard@sustainableeelgroup.org

Any complaints about the SEG standard system, to include this MEL system, if they are unresolved after contacting the email address above, are addressed to the SEG Chairman at:

info@sustainableeelgroup.org. To log a formal complaint, stakeholders can use our [015 Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#).

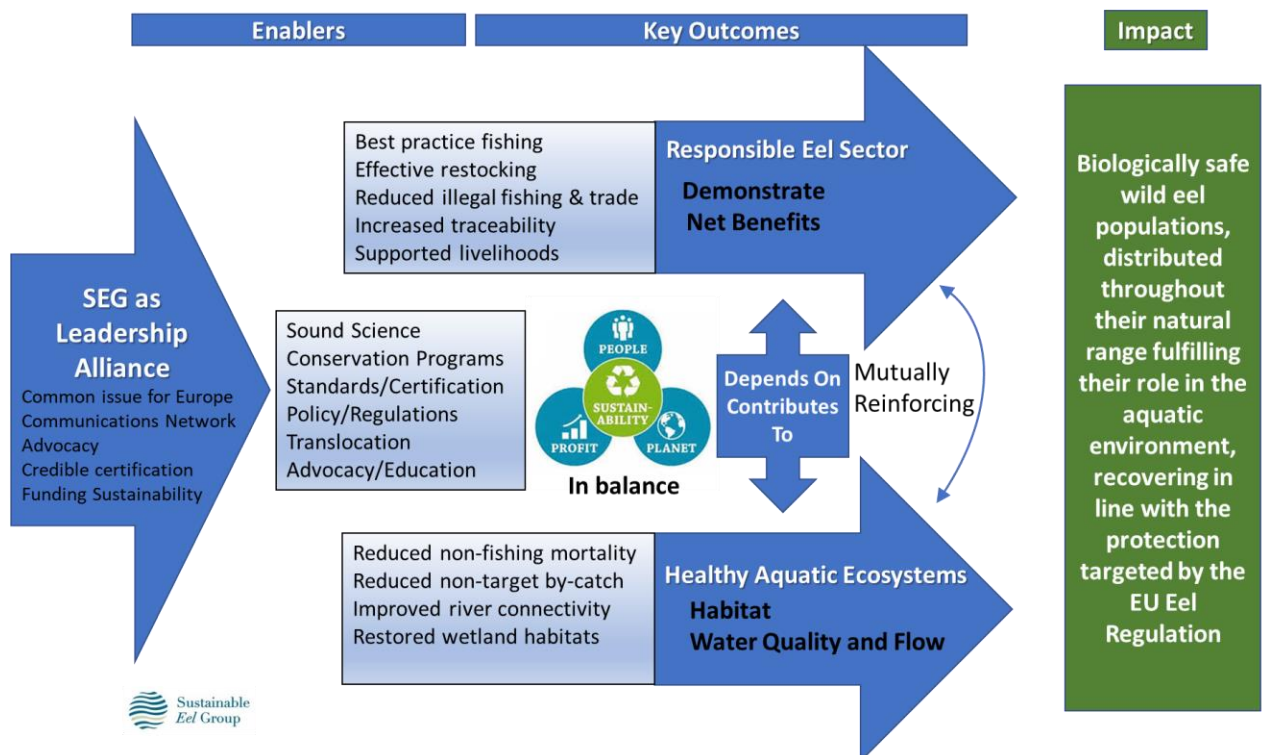
6. Defining the intended change

Our Theory of change describes the change SEG intends to achieve through its various strategies and interventions. It is summarised in the diagram below and subsequent narrative.

6.1 Intended impacts (long term)

The long term impacts are, as described in the green box in the Theory of Change diagram below:

Biologically safe wild eel populations, distributed throughout their natural range, fulfilling their role in the aquatic environment, recovering in line with the protection targeted by the Eel Regulation.



The intended long term impacts are described in more detail here. Targets and measures are discussed in section 7 and presented in greater detail in [302 MEL Plan](#).

Healthy wild eel populations distributed throughout their natural range

We wish to see the quantities of Glass eel returning to Europe's rivers and wetlands increasing to previously abundant levels, yellow eels common throughout their natural range, and good returns of silver eels to the sea to spawn and perpetuate the population.

Healthy aquatic ecosystems

It has taken centuries of industrialisation to block, degrade and pollute our ecosystems. So, it will take a long time and huge financial and political investment to return them to anything like natural. But we also have to be realistic. A great deal of land and wetlands have been drained to create productive farm land, homes or industry - it is unrealistic to expect those all to be reversed.

Our strategies include supporting, influencing and maximising the efforts to unblock migratory pathways, both up and downstream, to minimise entrainment in pumps and to restore wetlands in order to maximise the habitat available and the productivity of the eel. We wish to see more kilometres of river opened up, more wetlands accessible, more wetlands restored, more pumping stations with better protection against entrainment.

Sustainable use for the benefit of thriving local communities, economies and traditions

Eels have been eaten and traded by man for centuries. Countries and local communities have developed unique relationships and cultures around catching and eating eels. As eel populations have declined and as market forces have pushed prices up, those traditions have declined.

Our strategies, in particular adoption of the SEG standard, are to develop and promote responsible fishing and trade in the eel such that it can recover and maintain both cultures and incomes for communities and play its role in the aquatic habitat. The longer-term target is to see a sustainable recovery supporting sustainable use.

6.2 Intended outcomes (short and medium term)

The intended short- and medium-term outcomes we expect to see as a result of compliance with the standard and through our other strategies are described in more detail here. Targets and measures are provided in section 7 and presented in greater detail in [302 MEL Plan](#).

Best practice fishing

SEG has developed and improved the SEG standard to define, encourage and assess that eel fishing practices meet the best possible standards. Individual assessments will identify how well individual fisheries and traders are meeting those standards.

Our next challenge is to market and promote the standard such that even more of the sector wishes to take it up (targeting next the wild yellow and silver eel fishing supply, to build on the success with the glass eel supply chain over the past 10 years) and fewer wish to engage in non-certified or even illegal activities.

So, some of the performance indicators and targets are to test the take-up of the standard and associated best practices.

Illegal trade reduced

The illegal trade (to Asia) of eels was previously estimated by Europol to be 100 tonnes per year (300 million fish) in 2017/18, and 25% of the natural stock. As a significant threat to the viability of the species, and to legitimate legal businesses and livelihoods, SEG is pursuing a series of strategies to tackle and reduce the illegal trade.

SEG has access to data and information to indicate the scale of the illegal trade. We will report those and will hope to see year-on-year reductions over the coming years. We are pleased to note that Europol reported the level of illegal exports in 2022/23 to be approx. 50% of the 2017/18 level. Whilst that is welcome, it is still too much and we will continue our endeavours to minimise the illicit trade.

Effective restocking

The Eel Regulation requires that 60% of all Glass eels caught are used for restocking. In 2017 only 21% of those reported as caught were restocked, and this doesn't include those illegally caught and not reported. The SEG standard is designed to require those certified to make their contribution to the 60%. So, this is included to measure our and others' achievement of this important eel management strategy. The proportion of the legal trade used for restocking in 2022/23 was reported as 52 %; a substantial increase on 2017/18.

Recognition of SEG strategies and standard

It is important to SEG to be seen as credible, and to be independently recognised as such. As the world-leading membership body for sustainability standards, SEG regards the ISEAL Alliance as the most suitable evaluator. SEG is a Community Member of ISEAL and is working towards ISEAL Code Compliance.

Increased traceability

Traceability is another key objective of the Eel Regulation. The aim is to adopt better traceability systems so that fewer might be lost via the illegal trade. The SEG standard requires traceability so that traders can demonstrate where their eels originated and that they are from certified sources. This helps to tackle the illegal trade.

Eel conservation programmes

In recognition of the eel's status, there has been significant investment in eel conservation programmes since the introduction of the EC Eel Regulation in 2007. One of SEG's strategies is to support the implementation of a greater number of more effective projects to help the eel's recovery. SEG will monitor those under its direct influence and those with which it is a partner.

6.3 Enablers

The 'Enablers' in the Theory of Change are described in more detail:

Publication of a substantially revised SEG standard

Over two consultation exercises in 2017 and 2023 there was intensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders which (1) created a better quality standard and (2) influenced more organisations that a responsible eel sector is possible. New [standards](#) were published in June 2018 and November 2023.

Membership of ISEAL

Being a Community Member of ISEAL has (1) caused SEG to consider our aims and strategies more carefully and (2) has shown, even through the application and preparation processes, that it will provide independent credibility for our aims, objectives and strategies.

NGO endorsement

To be effective, we need the support of a wide range of organisations, so that objectives can be aligned and we can spend our individual and collective time, effort and budgets on strategies that will help the eel. Partnership and collaborative projects will be more successful and we will be more effective at gaining grant funding. So, we are working in partnership, networking, having a strong social media presence, seeking ISEAL membership and demonstrating that we are seeking a science, conservation-based and commercially sustainable future for the eel. These are strategies that are enabling increasingly greater support from a wide range of NGOs, governments, universities and other organisations.

Advocacy and influencing government policies

To be effective, we also need to be able to influence European Commission and national government policies that affect the aquatic environment and the eel. Since forming, our credibility has built, perhaps because we have shown ourselves to be an objective and balanced collaboration of scientists, conservationists and the commercial sector working together, rather than operating from a single interest. We have increasingly made representations and views on eel and aquatic policies and legislation to national governments and their agencies, and to EC fisheries and environmental committees and MEPs. We have been influential in gaining sustainable outcomes for the eel and in 2018 we were invited by the European Council to contribute to their substantial review of the Eel Regulation in 2018 and 2019. We have influenced debate in the European Parliament and its supporting institutions, in particular by coalescing support for adequate implementation the single most important piece of legislation for protection of the European eel: the Eel Regulation.

6.4 SEG Standard performance indicators

Measures, targets and intended outcomes are described in Section 13, 'Measures' in the [SEG Standard](#). This was published in June 2018 and recently revised in 2023. The measures are included in Section 7, below and are in fuller detail in the [302 MEL Plan](#).

6.5 Unintended effects

It is challenging to predict the unintended effects of a successful programme. The following are descriptions of original, since discovered and newly identified possibilities and observations where we have them.

Originally identified in 2018

- **Demand for consumption of certified eel might become greater than the market can supply, putting up prices or putting pressure on stocks.**
This has not been realised since 2018. The demand has increased from 10 tonnes of SEG certified glass eels in 2018 to 35 tonnes in 2023. This is easily met by the supply of 60. Demand could increase further and could increase beyond 60 tonnes; however that is likely to be restricted by the quotas set by fisheries scientists. If prices rise, that would be an economic advantage for the fishers.
- **Cost of participation (assessment and certification) may be a barrier for some.**
This only affects fishers, and has been circumvented by groups of fishers coming together to be certified in groups as a fishery.
- **Legitimate, responsible fishing may increase the ‘cover’ for illegal fishing and, causing trafficking to increase further.**
Whilst there are some who might see as being in the SEG programme as ‘cover’ or ‘greenwash’, the quality and rigour of auditing since appointing a new CAB has identified and greatly reduced previous malpractices. Checking traceability, the correct use of documentation and application of the law have undoubtedly increased traceability and reduced illegal activity. The number of arrests has increased and Europol reports the level of trafficking to have reduced by 50%.
- **Some fisheries or practices may not be able to meet the standard and they may feel the only option is to sell to uncertified or even illegal markets.** Some businesses have closed in the past five years – usually because they have lost market share – either because of poor management or, in a few cases, because they have not achieved the SEG standard. Some operators have not achieved the standard because of recent illegal practices, and have retained themselves in uncertified and illegal markets.

Discovered since

- **Creating a monopoly?** The SEG programme has been so successful in the glass eel sector in France that over 90% of fishers are now certified and 90% of the end market is demanding SEG certified eels. However, there are a small number of ‘dealers’ in between those parts of the sector - approx. four: two major and two minor. One of the major players has been unable to become certified, thereby losing market share, and has complained that SEG has created a monopoly, and to their detriment. SEG has made it clear that the scheme is open to anyone and there are currently three active SEG certified traders in France.

Potential in 2023

Newly identified unintended effects in 2023 are:

- As SEG has revised its standard in 2023 and undertaken a risk assessment, it has discovered and prepared for the unexpected effects of the EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

Stakeholder input on unintended effects

Stakeholders shall be specifically asked for their opinions and any evidence about unintended effects when the MEL Plan is revised and there is an associated consultation exercise.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan

7.1 Key performance indicators and performance monitoring

[302 MEL Plan](#) lists the key performance indicators we currently and intend to monitor for tracking of progress towards the SEG Theory of Change, as well as periodically assess in deeper contextualized analysis of evaluations (See 7.3).

These performance indicators aim to address measurement of (1) strategies (enablers), sustainability impacts described in our Theory of Change, (2) the aims of the components of the SEG standard, (3) assumptions in our system and (4) performance and learning from System Management reviews.

We collate and publish these annually in a 'SEG Annual Report', which will grow as our collection of performance data increases. The different levels of data and information to be collected and reported are represented in the SEG MEL System data pyramid below.

We have suggested targets and will consult further with the sector on how suitable and realistic these are publication. We have indicated where we will source the information and will work with our partners in the sector and the Conformity Assessment Bodies to collect these data in the most effective and efficient ways.

Currently, we collect and track some of these indicators in our Excel based database - e.g. the number of glass eels traded and their use, illegal trafficking data. We have been using those to inform our interventions – e.g. to lobby the sector and the European Commission to do more to meet the aims and requirements of the Eel Regulation.

7.2 How the MEL System operates

The performance monitoring system operates in future as follows:

- The SEG team collects data from a variety of sources throughout the year, to include independent evaluation reports,
- At a SEG Board meeting in October it conducts an annual System Management review, to consider and review the performance data on its range of activities and the variety of sources, as presented in [302 MEL Plan](#). It will consider:
 - an assessment of the ease / difficulty with which the data was collected, with comments and recommendations about how to improve our performance monitoring system,
 - comments and recommendations about amending targets,
 - recommendations about seeking feedback from our stakeholders
 - an assessment of the performance of the sector overall, and of each part of the sector
 - the impact of our and others' interventions so far,
 - recommendations of what interventions should continue, start or stop in order to have more impact to meet our aims.;
- Using that review, the SEG Board produces an action plan of the improvements it plans to make. Much of this forms the basis of the SEG Business Plan for the following calendar year;
- At its Annual General Meeting in March, SEG presents and publishes its Annual Impacts Report.

7.3 Outcome and Impact Evaluations

As the SEG system is outcome based, the annual performance monitoring report will include an outcome evaluation of a key element of our activities as per our Theory of Change, for example into aspects surrounding eel science, trade, culture and economics. The MEL Plan identifies a series of potential evaluations to undertake and new options and opportunities present themselves each year. At its annual management system review the SEG Board identifies the priority evaluation to commission in the following year.

From 2023 at least one evaluation per year is being commissioned to investigate intended impacts and outcomes as identified in the Theory of Change. These are designed to:

- Determine whether it is possible to attribute observed changes to the SEG standard system.
- Assess whether the SEG system intervention is producing the desired and intended sustainability outcomes and impacts.
- Investigate what unintended effects (positive or negative) resulted from the activities or intervention assessed.
- Assess to what extent it is possible to attribute the observed effects to the activity or intervention of the standards system.
- Consider what factors could have influenced the results (both factors within SEG’s control and other external factors).

Examples of previously commissioned studies include:

Studies already published:

- [Evaluation of eel stocking across Europe and recommendations for improvement](#). The aim of this was to review and improve the quantity and quality of Glass eels available for restocking across Europe (see ‘Effective Restocking’ as an Enabler in the ToC diagram).
- [Quantifying the illegal trade in European glass eels \(*Anguilla anguilla*\): Evidences and Indicators](#). The aim of this was to quantify the scale of illegal trade, to influence the EU and enforcement agencies to put more effort into tackling it. (see ‘Reduced Illegal Fishing and Trade’ as an Enabler in the ToC diagram).
- **Determining the potential of otolith and tissue microchemistry for the traceability of glass eels**. This aimed to provide the ability to identify which estuary in Europe, eels found in Asian markets came from, enabling traceability of fish and to tackle the illegal trade (see ‘Reduced Illegal Fishing and Trade’ and ‘Increased Traceability’ as Enablers in the ToC diagram).
- **Trial Implementation of a tele-declaration system to reach full traceability of the UK glass eel fisheries** (see ‘Increased Traceability’ as an Enablers in the ToC diagram).
- **Brue Valley Eel Improvement Project**. This was a project to identify and improve connectivity for better eel migration in this catchment that is rich in wetlands, but also barriers (see ‘Improved River Connectivity’ as an Enabler in the ToC diagram). This is informing a new project, started in 2023: the [Somerset Eel Recovery Project](#).
- **European eel *Anguilla anguilla* distribution, passage and habitat use in a whole river catchment in North Norfolk, UK**. This was a project to understand eel ecology better, to then inform better eel conservation projects and European states’ Eel Management Plans (see ‘Conservation Programmes’ as an Enabler in the ToC diagram)
- **Bristol Fish Project: A people and place-based approach to eels and communities in the Bristol Channel**. This was a project to identify how eel aquaculture can be used in ‘aquaponics’ to grow

eels and vegetables, for a more sustainable way to provide food for humans (see ‘Supported Livelihoods’ and ‘Conservation Programmes’ as Enablers in the ToC diagram).

- **Pilot of the SEG Standard in North America.** This project tested the feasibility of adapting the SEG Standard for European eel for use, in North America, with fishing and trade of the American eel.

Studies in progress:

- **Evaluation of SEG’s Impacts on Illegal Eel Fishing and Trade.** Hull University (Hull International Fisheries Institute) was commissioned in 2023 to undertake an independent analysis of what impact SEG has had on reducing illegal fishing and trade.

Evaluation reports are published on the SEG website, for example at:

<https://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/seg-reports/> and <https://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/evaluation-reports/>

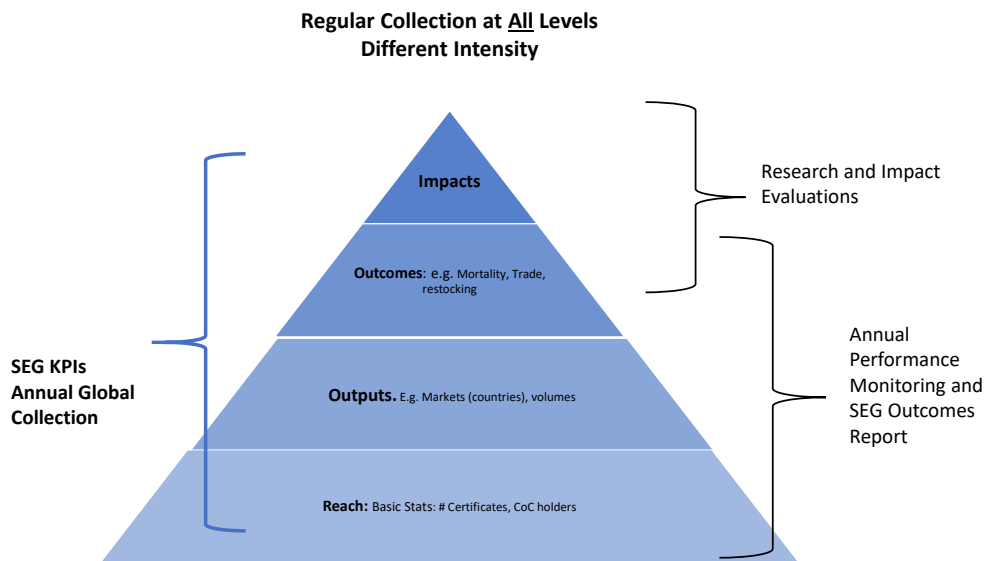
Content of Evaluation Reports

Evaluation reports will be commissioned to include:

- The purpose of the evaluation or analysis and the guiding evaluation questions.
- Names of people involved in conducting the evaluation, their qualifications, and their connection to the entity or system being evaluated.
- Methodology.
- Findings and conclusions, including both positive and negative effects.
- Any limitations of the evaluation or analysis.
- How the context might have affected the results.
- Specifications for Evaluation reports (both internal and external) are in [304 Terms of Reference for Evaluation Reports](#).

7.4 SEG MEL System Data Pyramid

This diagram represents different levels of MEL data in our system. Actual examples throughout the pyramid are presented in the diagram at 4.3 in 302 MEL Plan.



8. Learning and improving

SEG will publish its annual Impacts Report with its AGM in the spring. SEG intends to learn and improve from these publications each year as described below.

As we publish the reports, we will seek feedback from the partners, stakeholders and contributors in the sector on:

- the most useful and informative data to collect and report,
- the most efficient and effective processes and mechanisms to collect the data,
- the most informative and accessible ways to present the reports,
- the effect of interventions, i.e. actions and strategies, to achieve our aims and objectives,
- the unintended effects of strategies to support the eel and the sector, whether by SEG or others,
- changes needed to interventions to best meet the aims and objectives outlined in our Theory of Change.

From the combined feedback of what we learn in each annual cycle, we will (1) review whether any indicators and targets should change, (2) review whether any methods of collation, should change, (3) review whether any methods of presentation, publication and communication should change and (4) what interventions should change to have a greater impact. Those changes will be put into effect for the following annual cycle of business planning (actions) and reporting.

The reporting will continue annually in this way with a similar cycle but will be adjusted according to learning each year. The aim will be not to change too many measures over time, otherwise there will be no meaningful comparisons. Some examples of what should remain consistently reported are: (1) eel stock (glass eel and silver eel) indicators, (2) the proportion of the sector adopting the SEG standard, (3) % of glass eels used for restocking and (4) the level of Illegal trafficking.

We will measure and observe trends in performance towards the specified targets. Where the trends are improving towards the target, or declining away from the target, will guide where further intervention may or may not be needed, including an assessment of the suitability of the target. Note that whilst many of the performance measures are numerical indicators, and therefore easy to compare trends, the causes of

any changes are less easy to understand and compare. This is where interpretation by a range of informed experts is required from different parts of the sector and is built into the learning cycle.

By repeating the annual cycle, SEG will apply continuous learning and improvement to the MEL System. Learning from outcome and impact evaluations, research and other studies will be used to inform and review SEG's strategies and interventions to improve the eel population and support the sector in pursuit of the SEG goals.

9. Transparency and public information

9.1 Publicly available information

Our MEL System Public Statement is published in the SEG website page [SEG Standard System](#). This statement includes:

- the contact point for submission of any comments, questions or complaints about the MEL system,
- a description of the current scope and boundaries of the MEL system,
- an explanation of the scheme's strategies, intended outcomes and impacts, and the most significant unintended effects,
- a link to a list indicators being used in the MEL system,
- a link to and examples of completed, ongoing and planned outcome and impact evaluations,
- procedures and opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the design and revision of the MEL system and the results of these consultations.

This MEL System and other SEG Standard system documents are published on the SEG website at [SEG Standard System](#).

Performance reports will be produced annually and published by SEG on its website at [Evaluation Reports](#). They will go through a data quality control check and be peer-reviewed internally before publication.

SEG also publishes a [Public Statement](#) to indicate how the M&E system will operate.

Conformity Assessment Body audit reports and certificates of those certified can be accessed from the [SEG Standard Register](#).

9.2 Transparency of evaluations

As the SEG System is outcome based, the annual performance monitoring report will be an outcome evaluation of the system. Those reports will be made publicly available (see above).

Summaries of all outcome and impact evaluations will be published on the SEG website under [Evaluation Reports](#) and where possible, all full reports as well.

SEG currently provides a centralised resource for scientific studies on the SEG website with full reports at: <http://www.sustainableeelgroup.org/conservation-scientific-publications/>



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