



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** American Eel Management Board

**FROM:** Caitlin Starks, Senior FMP Coordinator

**DATE:** April 22, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Public Comment on Draft Addendum VI to the American Eel Fishery Management Plan

The following pages represent a draft summary of all public comments received by ASMFC on American Eel Draft Addendum VI as of 11:59 PM (EST) on March 24, 2024 (closing deadline).

Comment totals for the Draft Addendum are provided in the table below, followed by a summary of the state public hearing, and written comments sent by organizations and individuals. A total of 32 written comments were received. These included 2 letters from organizations, and the remainder from individual industry stakeholders and concerned citizens. One public hearing was held via webinar. The total public attendance at the hearing was 23 individuals. No public comments were provided during the public hearing.

The following tables are provided to give the Board an overview of the support for each of the management options contained in Draft Addendum VI. Additional comments that did not indicate support for a particular option are included in the written comment summaries. Prevailing themes from the comments are highlighted below, including general considerations and rationales for support or opposition.

**Table 1. Total Comments Received by ASMFC**

Total Comments Received	
Public Hearing Comments	0
Total Form Letters	0
Organization Letters	2
Individual Comments	30
<b>Total Written Comments</b>	<b>32</b>

**Table 2. Total Comments in Support of Each Option**

Management Options	Written Comments	Organization Letters	Total
<b>3.1, Option 1 (Status Quo)</b>	27	1	<b>28</b>
<b>3.2, Option 1 (No Sunset)</b>	2	1	<b>3</b>
<b>3.2, Option 2 (Three Years)</b>		1	<b>1</b>
<b>3.2, Option 3 (Three Years with Ability to Extend)</b>			<b>0</b>

Prevailing themes from the public comments on Addendum VI are summarized below.

***Rationales for 3.1 Option 1 (Status Quo Quota)***

- There have been changes over the years for both conservation efforts (e.g., dam removals) and laws to protect the species and be able to harvest them without causing depletion.
- Maine’s glass eel fishery is well managed and regulated, with individual quotas and daily catch reporting and a swipe card system. This has resulted in few law enforcement issues.
- Maine is unique in that it has large amounts of habitat.
- Elvers are plentiful and fishermen can easily fill their current quotas early in the season, allowing significant numbers of elvers to migrate upstream.

***Rationales for 3.2 Option 1 (No Sunset for Maine Quota)***

- The quota is working and should stay in place.

***Rationales for Issue 2 Option 2 (Three Year Duration of Quota)***

- The ASMFC should adopt Option 2 for the quota timeline to ensure a full review of the quota prior to 2028. This option encourages the ASMFC to embrace adaptive management principles. Undertaking a full review of the quota in three years would allow the ASMFC to make any necessary adjustments based on changed conditions, and also provide an opportunity for engagement and coordination with the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

***Additional Comments***

- Three comments argued that the Maine glass eel quota should be increased.
  - The quota should be increased back up to 18,000 pounds.
  - It would not hurt the biomass given the small number of fishermen.
  - Fishermen should be given credit for dam removal and habitat restoration work.
- States without glass eel fisheries should not get to vote on Maine’s management.
- The Passamaquoddy Tribe expressed concerns regarding ASMFC management of the American eel resource. Two key recommendations include:

- The ASMFC should consult with the Tribe prior to proposing any management actions that will affect American eel and other species in its region.
- ASMFC and its state and federal partners should prioritize population and habitat restoration efforts over harvest quotas.
- One individual commented that they favor any measures to reduce or end harvest.

## **American Eel Draft Addendum VI Public Hearing**

*Webinar Hearing*

*February 28, 2024*

*23 Public Participants*

Commissioners: Pat Keliher (ME), Megan Ware (ME), Cheri Patterson (NH), Doug Grout (NH), Jeff Kaelin (NJ), Kris Kuhn (PA), Roy Miller (DE), Chris Wright (NOAA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Toni Kerns (ASMFC), Robert Atwood (NH), Jessica Best (NY), Deirdre Gilbert (ME), Taylor Shewokis (ME), Jonathan Varnum (ME), Daniel Vogel (ME), Jordan Zimmerman (DE)

### Hearing Overview

- No public comments were provided.

**American Eel Addendum VI Public Hearing Attendance**

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
Debra	Abercrombie	debra_abcrombie@fws.gov
Travis	Atwood	wadeatwood420@yahoo.com
Robert	Atwood	robert.atwood@wildlife.nh.gov
Jessica	Best	jessica.best@dec.ny.gov
Jessica	Card	jessicadanico7@gmail.com
Jeanne	Christie	jeanne.christie@mail.house.gov
Michael	Clough	mikeclough@mail.com
Ralph	Dana	rdana.7@gmail.com
Danny	Deraps	jessderaps@msn.com
G	F	graciejffishing@gmail.com
Tom	Fote	tfote@jcaa.org
Lance and Shelly	Geidel	smgeidel@tds.net
Deirdre	Gilbert	Deirdre.Gilbert@maine.gov
Norman	Gray	Normangray695@gmail.com
Doug	Grout	degrou@comcast.net
L	Hudson	landis@mainerivers.org
Billy	Johnson	billyj7015@gmail.com
Jeff	Kaelin	jkaelin@lundsffish.com
Lary	Keating	larykeating69@gmail.com
Pat	Keliher	patrick.keliher@maine.gov
Toni	Kerns	tkerns@asmfc.org
Morgan	Krell	mkrell@inlandbays.org
Kris	Kuhn	kkuhn@pa.gov
Roy	Miller	fishmaster70@comcast.net
John	Newell	jd_71@msn.com
Jason	Pardilla	jppardilla@hotmail.com
Cheri	Patterson	cheri.patterson@wildlife.nh.gov
Taylor	Shewokis	taylor.shewokis@maine.gov
Rustin	Taylor	Rustintaylor955@gmail.com
Jonathan	Varnum	jonathan.varnum@maine.gov
Dan	Vogel	daniel.vogel@maine.gov
Megan	Ware	megan.ware@maine.gov
Jeffrey	Willey	effreywilley87@gmail.com
Chris	Wright	chris.wright@noaa.gov
Darrell	Young	ayoung1972.40@gmail.com
Jordan	Zimmerman	jordan.zimmerman@delaware.gov
Mike	Klingerman	melindaklingerman@gmail.com
Sara	Rademaker	sara@americanunagi.com



Passamaquoddy Tribe  
Joint Tribal Council

Motahkmikuk (207) 796-2301  
Sipayik (207) 853-2600



March 22, 2024

Sent via Electronic Mail

Caitlin Starks  
Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Re: Draft Addendum VI to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel

Ms. Starks:

We write on behalf of the Passamaquoddy Tribe (“Tribe”) to provide comments on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (“ASMFC”) *Draft Addendum VI to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel* (“Addendum VI”).<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The Tribe is a sovereign and federally-recognized Indian tribe that maintains communities at two separate reservations: Sipayik and Motahkomikuk (i.e., Pleasant Point and Indian Township). We are a fishing people. Our name, Passamaquoddy, translates to “people who spear pollock.” We have relied on marine resources for cultural and nutritional well-being since time immemorial. The Tribe’s citizens continue to fish for various saltwater, freshwater, and anadromous species in order to provide a moderate livelihood for their families and carry on their cultural practices.

The American eel, called *katehsis* in Passamaquoddy, is, in particular, a culturally and economically important food and marine resource for the Tribe and its citizens. Historically, American eels were a cornerstone of the Tribe’s diet, partly because of their abundance and presence throughout regional waterways for most of the year. Passamaquoddy People ate eels fresh or dried and smoked them for winter subsistence. Eels also provided for our practical needs. Eel skin is tough and shrinks when dried, making it useful for a variety of purposes. Eel fat can be used as a sunscreen, insect repellent, and water proofing agent. Eel organs are an effective bait for catching larger fish.

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<sup>1</sup> The Tribe’s submission of these comments does not substitute for consultation with the ASMFC. Furthermore, the Tribe reserves the right to submit additional comments regarding Addendum VI after the deadline for public comments.

Today, Passamaquoddy fishermen participate in annual harvests of glass and elver eels pursuant to the Tribe's laws and a fish management plan, which are adjusted annually based on quota and other regulatory updates. Beginning the third week of March every year, hundreds of Passamaquoddy citizens will spread out from the St. Croix River on the northern border of Maine to the Portland area and further south to engage in an annual elver fishery. This elver fishery will result in millions of dollars in critical income flowing to tribal households from the harvest of glass eels. Multiple generations of tribal citizens gather together in traditional fishing places throughout the state to annually harvest eels around this time, which is a period of great joy and comradery among the Passamaquoddy People. Simply put, the Tribe's annual eel fishery is a culturally celebrated time that presents tribal citizens with lucrative economic opportunities not otherwise present in our communities in rural Maine. To safeguard and expand these opportunities, as well as protect an important cultural resource and practice, the Tribe's current fish management plans focus on supporting sustainable American eel fisheries through habitat restoration and fish passage measures.

Because of our historical and contemporary connections with American eel, the Tribe has a significant interest in any regulatory action which implicates the management of the species, including the ASMFC's development of and proposed actions under Addendum VI. The Tribe therefore offers the following comments on Addendum VI, which focus on four topics: the ASMFC's lack of consultation or coordination with the Tribe prior to releasing Addendum VI for public comment; the ASMFC's apparent focus on harvest quotas at the expense of more holistic habitat and population restoration efforts; the proposed harvest quota in Addendum VI; and the proposed quota timeline options in Addendum VI.

## **2. Comments on Addendum VI**

- A. *The ASMFC should consult with the Tribe prior to proposing any management actions that will affect American eel and other species in our region.*

The Tribe's primary concern with Addendum VI is the ASMFC's lack of coordination or engagement with the Tribe in developing it. The ASMFC did not invite the Tribe to consult or otherwise provide input as it was considering a proposed quota. The ASMFC did not provide the Tribe with an advanced or preliminary draft copy of Addendum VI prior to publication. Instead, the Tribe received notice of Addendum VI and the opportunity to comment at the same time as the general public. Given our important role and interests in American eel management, the ASMFC should have engaged the Tribe early in the process to solicit our input on a proposed quota and any other terms to be included in Addendum VI.

The ASMFC's failure to consult or coordinate with the Tribe speaks to a larger problem: the Tribe's lack of a voice in the ASMFC decision-making process. Currently, the ASMFC adopts harvest quotas which "flow down" to the State of Maine and then to the Tribe. The Tribe has little influence on those quotas and other ASMFC decisions, despite the potential effect on our fish management efforts and our citizens' fishing opportunities. The Tribe desires a "seat at the table" and a more collaborative relationship with the ASMFC, through which we can participate in ASMFC Boards, Committees, and Panels to assist with developing, updating, and implementing management plans for American eel and other species.

The Tribe's participation would provide a forum to raise concerns over the ASMFC's and its member states' proposed management actions, which often negatively impact our fisheries and our citizens' economic opportunities. For example, in 2013, Maine adopted a "swipe card" system for elver fishing, without the Tribe's consent, which caused reporting delays and other issues that resulted in overfishing, wasted catches, and other disruptions to tribal fishing. The same year, Maine also implemented a voluntary glass eel reduction. Addendum VI characterizes this as "the first glass eel quota in Maine," even though the Tribe was the first sovereign within the State of Maine to utilize a total allowable cap/poundage quota for eel management purposes. The ASMFC adopted the first formal glass eel quota the following year. Per a 2022 report by a team of researchers from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, the real capita per income of the Tribe and the other Wabanaki Nations was steadily rising from 2008 until it dropped sharply in 2013. The temporal correlation between the new swipe card system to implement the State of Maine's "new" quota approach and the precipitous drop in tribal member income from eel fishing suggests that Maine's and the ASMFC's management actions on glass eel had a substantial and detrimental effect on the Tribe's economy. If the Tribe had a seat at the ASMFC, it could have flagged these potential outcomes for the ASMFC and Maine before the swipe card system and quotas were formally adopted.

The Tribe is well-positioned to contribute to the ASMFC's fish management work. The Tribe has centuries of experience in sustainable management of aquatic resources and can advise the ASMFC on strategies for restoring and supporting viable populations and habitat. For the benefit of the resources and our constituents, the Tribe and the ASMFC should, wherever possible, work in tandem as co-managers instead of as two entirely separate entities managing the same species and populations.

The Tribe acknowledges that, at this point, it is likely too late for meaningful consultation and coordination on the development of Addendum VI. Moving forward, however, we urge the ASMFC to engage with the Tribe early and often whenever the ASMFC is considering any management actions that affect species in our traditional territory.

*B. The Tribe recommends that the ASMFC and its state and federal partners prioritize population and habitat restoration efforts over harvest quotas.*

The Tribe recognizes that the focus of Addendum VI is a harvest quota rather than other potential fish management actions. That said, the Tribe is concerned that the ASMFC places too much emphasis on quotas at the expense of other management strategies. Quotas do nothing to protect eel stocks from their biggest threats: habitat degradation and other non-fishing unnatural mortality such as encounters with hydroelectric turbines.

The ASMFC, in coordination with the Tribe and relevant federal and state agencies, should evaluate and implement strategies that produce meaningful benefits for American eel in Maine. For example, federal and state decision-makers should give serious consideration to removing any obsolete, unproductive, or particularly harmful dams that obstruct fish migration. For dams that cannot be removed, it is critical that fish passage infrastructure be updated and improved in a manner that mimics natural features as much as possible. Alternatively, resources should be dedicated to



collecting and transporting fish above dams, culverts, and other fish passage impediments using trucks. The restoration of habitat, through water quality improvement and other remedial measures, should likewise be a priority. The Tribe has seen success with these types of initiatives, and we urge the ASMFC and its state and federal partners to work with us to implement them on a wider scale.

*C. The Tribe does not take position on the harvest quota proposed in Addendum VI at this time but urges the ASMFC to ensure that the quota is based on best available science.*

As noted above, the ASMFC did not consult or coordinate with the Tribe prior to publishing Addendum VI for public comment. The Tribe accordingly had a very limited opportunity to review and evaluate the proposed quota. Without additional time to meaningfully consider the quota or the science to support it, the Tribe currently does not take a position in favor of or opposition to the quota proposed in Section 3.1 of Addendum VI.

The Tribe can, however, provide certain general comments concerning quotas. Higher quotas generally benefit the Tribe because they allow for greater harvests by our citizens. This in turn can generate wealth for tribal households and increase opportunities for participation in the cultural practice of eel harvesting. Therefore, in principle, the Tribe favors higher harvest quotas for American eel.

The Tribe's support for higher quotas is conditioned on the eel population being robust enough to remain viable following a large harvest in any given year. Consequently, any quota must be based on best available science as it relates the sustainability of the population. Without having closely reviewed the data and models that the ASMFC relied on in developing the proposed quota for Addendum VI, the Tribe does not know whether best available science supports the quota. We would note, however, that the analysis set forth in Addendum VI does not clearly explain the relationship between: the 2023 Assessment and Peer Review Reports' conclusion that the "American eel stock is depleted and has likely been experiencing overfishing in the last few decades," the findings on glass eel capture since 2022, and the proposal to maintain the status quo with respect to the harvest quota. Instead, Addendum VI seems to simply state the Assessment and Peer Review Reports' conclusion, describe the data on glass eel capture since 2022, and then propose the quota without explanation of why the ASMFC determined that the quota was suitable based on the available information.

The Tribe requests additional explanation from the ASMFC as to how, based on the Assessment and Peer Review Reports' conclusion and the glass eel capture data, it reached its determination that the proposed quota was proper.

*D. The ASMFC should adopt Option 2 for the quota timeline, thereby ensuring a full review of the quota prior to 2028.*

Per Section 3.2 of Addendum VI, the ASMFC is considering three "timeframe" options for Maine's glass eel quota: no sunset on the quota; three years; or three years, with the ability to extend via ASMFC Board action. The Tribe recommends that the ASMFC adopt Option 2, the three year timeframe, requiring the ASMFC Board to formally establish a new quota prior to the 2028 fishing

year. The Tribe prefers Option 2 because it encourages the ASMFC to embrace adaptive management principles. Under Option 2, the ASMFC will undertake a full review of the quota adopted through Addendum VI in three years, which will presumably allow the ASMFC to make any necessary adjustments based on changed conditions. Furthermore, a full review presents an opportunity for engagement and coordination between the Tribe and the ASMFC, as discussed above. Under Options 1 and 3, there is less urgency for the ASMFC to assess the effectiveness of the Addendum VI quota. This creates a risk of complacency or stagnation with respect to eel management. For these reasons, the ASMFC should select timeline Option 2.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Tribe appreciates the ASMFC's consideration of these comments. We reiterate that the Tribe is interested in developing a more collaborative relationship with the ASMFC and look forward to further discussions with the ASMFC to advance that goal. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mr. Corey Hinton at [mchinton@dmwlaw.com](mailto:mchinton@dmwlaw.com) or (207) 771-9238.

Sincerely,

/s/ Pos Bassett  
Pos Bassett  
Chief  
Pleasant Point Tribal Government

/s/ William Nicholas  
William Nicholas  
Chief  
Indian Township Tribal Government



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

500 Southborough Dr. Suite 204

South Portland, ME 04106

March 20, 2024

Caitin Starks, Senior FMP Coordinator

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 North Highland Street, Suite 200A-N

Arlington, VA 22201

In regard to Draft Addendum VI to the Interstate Fishery management Plan for American Eels, the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA) strongly urges you to accept *Option 1, Status quo* with no sunset. The Maine Department of Marine Resources has done a phenomenal job at managing the elver resource in taking precautionary steps to ensure future sustainability of the stock.

NEFSA officially launched in May of 2023 to advocate for fishermen from all different fisheries with the goal of protecting and preserving their heritage, marine resources, and the communities they support. Currently with over 800 active members (including many elver fishermen), NEFSA is the fastest growing fishing Association in New England. NEFSA's mission statement reads, "NEFSA is an alliance of the wild harvesters of the waters off of New England, dedicated to educating the public about how best to manage our seafood resources through sound science and best practices at conservation used by fishermen, with a view toward economic well-being, ecosystem sustainability and US food security."

The Maine Elver Fishery has grown to be the state's second-most valuable fishery, earning over twenty million dollars and landing 9,429 pounds in 2022. The elver fishery is a vital contributor to Maine's economy and over 400 fishermen from across the state seek to fill their lucrative quotas each year. Elver fishermen have continued to sustainably harvest glass eels and have successfully managed the stock in collaboration with the Maine Department of Marine Resources for decades.

Again, NEFSA urges you to support *Option 1, Status quo* with no sunset.

Thank you,

Dustin W. Delano

Chief Operating Officer

New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association



American Eel Board,

In regards to the New Addendum VI Time frame Maine Glass Eel Quota.

We as fishermen would choose Option 1 No Sunset

Print

SIGN

Print	SIGN
MICHAEL T. KLINGERMAN	Michael T. Klinger
Mark Lurvey	Mark Lurvey
Roger A Ranco II	Roger A Ranco II
JAMES CARD	James Card
Jeremy Card	Jeremy Card
Jessica Card	Jessica Card
Leslie RANCO	Leslie Ranco
Justin Ranco	Justin Ranco
BAXTER Jones II	Baxter P. Jones II
Roger Ranco II	Roger Ranco II
Frank White	Frank White
Perri# Chad	Chad Perri
GEORGE FORNI	George E Forni
William Sheldon	William Sheldon
Lisa Somes	Lisa Somes
Wayne Somes	Wayne Somes
Greg Ring	Greg Ring
MARK PIPER	Mark Piper
Roy Whalen Jr.	Roy Whalen Jr.
Roy Whalen III	Roy Whalen III
Cereste Whalen	Cereste Whalen

Caitlin Starks  
Senior FMP Coordinator  
Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 North Highland St, Suite 200A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201

#### Glass Eel Draft Addendum

In respect to Addendum VI, my family (3 license holders) would prefer Option 1, No Sunset. Maine's uniqueness, our conservation methods, and willingness to work with the ASMFC are the reasons why.

Maine has over 6000 streams, 200 rivers and only 425 licensed fisherman. A majority of these streams are not fished. By the time the elvers are running their best in the streams we do fish, our quota has already been filled. Also, Maine and NGO's have added over 20,000 acres of habitat through dam removals and fish passage to our vast tributaries. More plans are in the future as several big river systems in the state are being examined.

Maine's elver fisherman have been practicing successful conservation methods since the early 1990's. An individual could fish 5 nets in the early 90's, it was reduced to 2 nets in 1999. Also, the no fishing of the middle 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a river was implemented. More recently, a swipe card system and individual quota was put into place stopping illegal fishing, and allowing for real time data.

Our fishery has adopted several changes on behalf of the ASMFC, and has complied with every law. Our willingness to work with various groups and our continued conservation methods shows how committed we are to having a sustainable fishery.

When all this is considered you have a thriving and sustainable fishery. We feel we have earned this by practicing sound conservation methods. When discussing glass eels in the future please consider Maine and its uniqueness accordingly.

Sincerely,

Gregory M. Blackler  
Gregory S. Blackler  
Joseph B. Blackler

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Travis Atwood <wadeatwood420@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 23, 2024 5:57 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] GLASS EEL DRAFT ADDENDUM VI

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

HI ASMFC Members,

My name is Travis Atwood a Maine elver fishermen of over 30 years experience in the industry and I am also a co-director of the Maine Elver Fishermen's Association. I have been very involved with the elver fishery with lots of fishing experiences and lobbying for our harvesters and myself. I have seen a lot of changes over the years for both conservation efforts and laws to protect the species and be able to harvest them without causing depletion of elvers themselves. I take great care in my fishery as to work with you and our state to make sure we are all on the same page and to point out important things to you and our state working with our commissioner. I am also a member of a team that raises my elvers at a farm in Jefferson, Maine called American Unigi. So I get to actually see my elvers being farmed to harvest sizes. Our Farm has the capacity of 600 pounds of elvers to raise. 200 Aquaculture quota and 400 State of Maine glass eel quota. Just want you all to know that there are people like myself that are involved in many aspects of the industry all along protecting it. I also communicate with the guy that is doing our state of Maine eel life cycle surveys that is presented to your committee just to educate myself on all areas to make and or back good decisions in Maine's elver fishing industry. With that said I hope that in the future you guys (ASMFC) take consideration that elver fishermen like myself are very much involved and would love to work with your committee and hope you guys consider our options to help us all protect eels themselves. And so I would like you guys to consider Option 1 because it gives us and your committee time to make good decisions with the added time as to gather data on all aspects of the glass eel industry. Thank you all very much for letting me write your committee my opinion on the subject matter. Hope to some day meet some of you in person and just chat and pick each other's brains as well as to being respectful of each other's opinions as well.

THANK YOU ALL,  
Travis Atwood

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** smgeidel@tds.net  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 21, 2024 6:05 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] [NoTLS] Glass Eel Draft AddendumVI

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

Hello we are putting in our comments for the Glass Eel Draft Addendum VI, My husband and i both fish and we would like it to stay status Quo so Option 1 is what we both are wanting. so please put this in for 2 of us. Thank You for your time.

Lance and Shelly Geidel

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Jamie Robbins <5086paint@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 21, 2024 2:21 PM  
**To:** Caitlin Starks  
**Subject:** [External] Addendum VI

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing in regards to Addendum VI. My name is Jamie Robbins, I'm a maine elver fisherman. I support option 1: No sunset. We have a very well managed elver fishery in maine . I have seen many changes since 2012 to our fishery, All very positive. From quotas, swipe cards for live data. Dams being removed to open up miles of river. This has all paid off for Maines elver fishery . We see it on the banks, most fisherman are done in less than a month . This leaves the rivers wide open for most of the elver run . I have witnessed incredible amounts of elvers migrating up the rivers in the last few years . All thanks to the excellent management of the fishery .

Sincerely

Jamie Robbins  
16 Russell lane  
Warren , Maine 04864  
207-273-6116



## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** alexis rogers <lxsrgrs18@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 20, 2024 6:29 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Glass eel draft addendum VI

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

To Whom it may Concern,

I have been elver fishing since the early 1990's, and I feel that decreasing the quota is unnecessary , if anything, I feel we should be able to get more quota. The State of Maine has substantial conservation laws in effect to protect the elvers. There are three major rivers in Maine,The Penobscot, The Kennebec, and The Piscataquis, that never get fished because we are quota'd long before it is time to fish these rivers. Therefore I don't believe there is any reasons to change the quota as it stands.

Thank you,

Jeff W. Clark

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** billy Johnson <billyj7015@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, March 18, 2024 2:09 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Re:

On Mon, Mar 18, 2024, 11:35 AM billy Johnson <[billyj7015@gmail.com](mailto:billyj7015@gmail.com)> wrote:

To whom it may concern my feelings on the Maine elver fishery quota is as follows #1 . The elvers are very plentiful here in Maine when the majority of the 9688lbs are caught in about 3 weeks an even after we are done they are in epic numbers migrating an that's just here in Maine. As you know they migrate from sargasso sea all the way to newfoundland an only Maine an South Carolina fish that life stage.. #2 I feel that after all the work that had been done here the quota should be set back up to 18000lbs an it wouldn't hurt the biomass of population considering again there's only Maine with 425 fisherman an a small number of fisherman in South Carolina... I also feel that states having a vote on how we manage this fishery that have no elver fishery in their own state is kinda a conflict of interest ..because if we don't vote for their fishery then why would [they.be](#) in favor of ours ... maybe seprate the life stages also.. ..

Sincerely

Fred .b johnson III

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Timothy Bunker <tbunk360@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 17, 2024 1:21 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Glass Eel Draft Addendum VI

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

Please support option 1. Our fishery is well regulated and has very few problems of any kind for law enforcement. Daily catch reporting and individual catch quotas, ensure a healthy future for the biomass. As the second most valuable fishery in our state, many families have come to rely heavily on the income generated by this fishery. It is a stable, healthy fishery and resource and the harvest should continue at current levels or be increased.

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** G2W2  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 28, 2024 2:30 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** FW: [External] Draft Addendum VI Elvers

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**From:** angela young <ayoung1972.40@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 27, 2024 2:52 PM  
**To:** G2W2 <G2W2@asmfc.org>  
**Subject:** [External] Draft Addendum VI Elvers

By shutting down the pigmented eels from Maine to Florida and Silver eels. And cutting back the yellow eels to 2500 in Maine. We are now seeing the results on glass eels. They are the thickest we have seen them. Guy with 30 pounds and under. Are catching their quota in two to three nights. Guys above that may take a week or a little more. We have a two month season from March 22 to June 7. Give us a 25% credit from dam removal and opening up habitat. Is only going to amount to maybe two extra nights of fishing.

Sent from Gmail Mobile

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Nelson Sigelman <nelson.sigelman@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 22, 2024 12:56 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Eel management

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

ASMFC members:

Drastic reductions in the harvest of elvers are necessary to save this valuable species. I favor any measures that will reduce or end the harvest.

Published in "[Martha's Vineyard Magazine](#)," Nov. 17, 2022

### **And Now for the Eel Story**

By Nelson Sigelman

An entry in a Pilgrim diary recorded one day after the English, who survived the brutal winter of their arrival and the Wampanoags agreed to a peace treaty, suggests that a fat, succulent eel has as much of a claim to the Thanksgiving holiday dinner table as a turkey.

Dated Friday, March 23, 1621, the entry appears in the Pilgrim journal known as [Mourt's Relation](#). It describes how Tisquantum, who spoke English and acted as a mediator and translator between the English and Wampanoags, supplied the hungry Pilgrims with a delectable meal.

"Tisquantum went at noone to fish for Eels, at night he came home with as many as he could well lift in one hand, which our people were glad of, they were fat & sweet, he trod them out with his feet, and so caught them with his hands, without any other Instrument."

For centuries, the American eel, one of the most enduring mysteries in natural science, was part of the natural bounty that Native Americans in coastal communities and later the English relied on to survive often harsh living conditions.

Martha's Vineyard's first inhabitants, the Wampanoags, trapped eels in handmade baskets and considered them excellent eating. Quansoo, now the name of a private beach on the Chilmark side of Tisbury Great Pond, is Algonquin for "place where the long fish is caught."

Early English residents harvested eels found in the Island's brooks, ponds, and bays. They trapped them in the warmer months and used specially designed spears that they thrust through holes they made in the ice to catch dormant eels in the winter when fresh fish was hard to come by.

In a diary entry dated February 14, 1822, Jeremiah Pease of Edgartown provides evidence of their abundance in the winter months. He wrote that he and Allen Coffin, also of Edgartown, "Went eeling. Caught 52 dozen."

Their hands full of 624 slimy fish, it is unlikely that Pease and Coffin paused to consider the mystery of the eel's lifecycle. The fish were plentiful and easily caught — until they were not.

### **The Eel Question**

The American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) and its closely linked cousin, the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), are catadromous, meaning Atlantic eels spend most of their lives in freshwater or brackish tidal environments. They only return to the ocean to spawn and then die.

Over thousands of years, the origin of the eel and how and where it reproduces bedeviled a long list of thinkers and scientists. The Greek philosopher Aristotle thought eels sprang from the mud of river bottoms. And before he worked to unravel the mysteries of the human mind, in 1876, a nineteen-year-old German scientist named Sigmund Freud spent months in a small room in the Italian city of Trieste dissecting eels looking for reproductive organs. He never found them. It took Johannes Schmidt, a determined Danish biologist, to answer the question of where eels breed. From 1904 to 1921, with a break for World War I when German U-boats made his study hazardous, Schmidt seined the ocean for floating eel larvae.

Working his way back from the largest to the smallest size larva he found, Schmidt tracked the source of the eels to the Sargasso Sea, a large portion of the western Atlantic Ocean east of the Bahamas and south of Bermuda.

Swedish journalist Patrik Svensson in “The Book of Eels” (Ecco), said having answered that question, Schmidt could still not explain how the masses of larvae in the western Atlantic sort themselves out, “...so that those individuals which belong to *Anguilla anguilla* ultimately find themselves in Europe, while those of *Anguilla rostrata* land on the shores of America and the West Indies.”

Svensson wrote, “We think we know that all eels are hatched in the Sargasso Sea, since that’s where the smallest examples of the willow leaf-like larvae have been found, but no one knows for certain why the eel insists on reproducing there and only there. No one knows for certain how it withstands the rigors of its long return journey, or how it navigates. It’s thought all eels die shortly after breeding since no living eels have ever been found after breeding season, but then again, no mature eel, living or dead, has ever been observed at their supposed breeding ground. Put another way, no human has ever seen an eel in the Sargasso Sea. Nor can anyone fully comprehend the purpose of the eel’s many metamorphoses. No one knows how long eels can live for.”

It is all part of what zoologists call “the eel question.”

## **The Good Years**

Eels begin life as an egg [with the odds of survival decidedly](#) stacked against them. They hatch into leaf-shaped larvae (leptocephalus). Through a combination of natural forces and propulsion, the larvae slowly make their way to coastal waters in Europe and North America. Those who survive their ocean journey transform into small, translucent glass eels several inches in length, also known as elvers.

In the spring, elvers migrate in from the sea and enter brooks, streams, and ponds to feed and grow. Adult eels, known as yellow eels for their slight yellowish tint, may remain in their home waterbody for up to twenty years before they respond to a natural signal that it is time to breed.

Mature “silver” eels, called neshaw by the Wampanoags, undergo a physical transformation in preparation for their return ocean migration. Their eyes and pectoral fins enlarge, and they become black on the top and silver on the bottom.

In the 1800s Island fishermen used baited eel pots, bottle-shaped containers with a funnel mouth and closed at one end, to harvest eels. The traps were laboriously constructed entirely of wood slats bound by lacing made from split pine roots. In later years, these were replaced with traps constructed of wire mesh.

In [“The Eel Fishery of Martha’s Vineyard,”](#) published February 1995 in the Dukes County Intelligencer, Edgartown native, Clyde L. Mckenzie, Jr., a longtime federal fishery research biologist, described the scope of the fishing activity in the last century.

“The major potting areas were Tisbury and Edgartown Great Ponds. In Tisbury Great Pond, Eric Cottle and Ben Mayhew worked together and set out 50 pots using a small outboard boat. They set their pots on the Chilmark side of the pond, while Norman Benson and his son, Franklin, set 36 pots on the West Tisbury side. Franklin also set pots in the Lagoon and James Pond.”

Manuel Ferreira and Winthrop “Sonny” Norton set 50 to 75 pots in Edgartown Great Pond. “Manuel, along with Joe and Gene Benefit, also set pots in Sengekontacket Pond, while ‘Wid’ Norton and others set theirs in the harbor off North Water Street, as well as in Katama Bay, and in Eel, Little Eel and Caleb’s Ponds.”

Because silver eels do not eat but live off their fat reserves on their return journey to the Sargasso Sea, fishermen devised a method to intercept the eels in the great ponds as they sought an exit to the sea. Beach pots were staked down in a trench just off the shoreline along the eel’s perceived route. Wings at the pot entrance helped direct the eels into the pot.

Mr. Mackenzie said that when the ponds were closed the “neshaws swam back and forth in a frenzy along the barrier beaches, seeking an opening to the sea ... occasionally during a southerly storm that washed the ocean over the beach, they were able to slither across the wet sand into open water.”

The fishermen stored their captured eels in submerged bins known as “keeper cars” before they transported them to market. Because eels did not survive if confined for any length of time in warm water, commercial trap fishing occurred primarily in September and October.

In the early 1900s, eels were packed in ice and shipped off in barrels and boxes. Later, mainland buyers sent tank trucks to the Island to pick up the catch. MacKenzie said that each Vineyard crew “could sell as many as 5000 to 7000 pounds of eels in the good years.

Fishing for eels was part of a natural cycle for Islanders who were reliant on the sea for a livelihood. It was hard work, but it could be profitable.

In the 1930s, Edwin Athearn, encouraged by Norman Benson, who sold him some pots, eeled in Lagoon Pond off Oklahoma Avenue.

Athearn told MacKenzie that just after Labor Day, he set out twelve pots. Early the next morning, he went out to tend them. “He couldn’t believe it,” MacKenzie said. “Hauling each pot was like lifting a bag of cement. Each pot was completely jammed with eels.”

Just before Christmas, a dealer from East Boston arrived in a tank truck to the Vineyard. Athearn recalled that he was paid more than \$1000. “A lot of money in the depression,” Athearn said. “It was probably the most profitable fishing I ever did.”

Once the ponds and bays froze, and the eels sought refuge in the eelgrass and mud where they lay dormant over the winter, the only way to catch them was to spear them through holes in the ice. This required stamina, skill, and luck. A report in a 1909 issue of the Vineyard Gazette described the pluck of Mr. Thomas Smith, “of the Head of the Pond,” who, after spearing eels through the ice, lifted his back basket full of eels and started for shore.

“Now the ice near the shore was rotten because of the many springs, and Mr. Smith, back basket and all, suddenly disappeared from view. Others who were out, saw the catastrophe and put for the shore, but were compelled to go roundabout because of the mush ice.”

“By the time they reached the shore, the old gentleman was discovered marching along for dry land, with the basket still on his back and someone hailed him that he had come pretty near getting drowned.”

“‘Well,’ says he, ‘I thought if I could hold my course I could drain the water,’ and out he walked as though it were an everyday occurrence.”

Eeling activity on Martha’s Vineyard began to wane after World War II as members of the generation that pursued eels and fishing as a way of life slowly began to disappear from the Vineyard landscape.

Speaking of the lifestyle that existed before the war, in 1967 Lawrence Jeffers of Edgartown told a Gazette columnist, “I fished for clams and quahaugs and scallops and eels. I remember when seventy or eighty or ninety boats would be out at once quahauging in Katama Bay. About all there was to do in those times was eeling and clamming.”

### **Got to Be Versatile**

Chris Murphy of Chilmark was one of the last Island men to eel commercially. He got his start as a boy catching the eels his parents disturbed while digging for steamers in Tisbury Great Pond.

“I sold them to John Pachico — everyone called him ‘Long John,’ — at John’s Fish Market in Vineyard Haven,” Murphy said. “That was my first cash crop. He got me to skin the eels so he could sell the eel meat and deliver the heads with the skin attached so he could sell it for bass bait.”

Longtime Island fishermen provided guidance. “What I got from all the old guys that were mentors to me, Norman Benson, Dan Manter, and others, was that you’ve got to be versatile,” he said.

Married and with children, Murphy began seriously trapping eels in the sixties to augment his other fishing activities. “I did it for many years as a seasonal piece of my world,” he said.

He’d set his pots right after the first storm in September when conditions were right for potting and holding eels.

“It was my favorite fishery,” Murphy said. “It was low impact. I was doing it with a three-horse outboard. I’d keep a boat in two or three different ponds and just carry the outboard from one pond to the next. I’d start out at daylight in the morning and probably by the end of the day haul about two hundred pots.”

The eels were transported to the mainland by tanker truck a few weeks before Christmas and then shipped to European markets where eel was a traditional holiday dish.

After twenty-five years in the late nineties, Murphy stopped fishing for eels because there were few eels to catch.

“What happened to the eels, that’s a big question,” Murphy said.

Cooper Gilkes of Edgartown, another of the last men to commercially trap eels, learned how to make wire traps from the Island dean of eeling.

“Norman Benson showed me how to make them and I came home and made ‘em up ... To really make it go you had to run a lot of traps. It was all seat of the pants. No GPS. None of that stuff. Pea soup fog, you were out there, two hundred pots ... oh my God, I used to come home and my head would be splitting.”

It was the heyday of big stripers and Gilkes began selling eels to tackle shops for bait. Soon he was selling eels out of a corner of his house, which later grew to become Coop’s, the popular bait and tackle shop that bears his name.

Fishing, clamming, scalloping, and eeling — fishermen were linked to the season.

“In those days, you were a waterman. You worked on the water. You scalloped, you quahogged, you eeled, fluked, scup, sea bass; that was when the waterman was a true waterman, not your doctors and lawyers and carpenters buying a commercial license

Asked why he stopped, he said flatly: “No eels.”

### **We are losing it**

American eel populations across their traditional habitats have plummeted. How bad is it? The Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) doesn’t really know.

According to the ASMFC, “From a biological perspective, much is still unknown about the species. Information is limited about their abundance, status at all life stages, and habitat requirements ... The stock is at or near historically low levels due to a combination of historical overfishing, habitat loss, food web alterations, predation, turbine mortality, environmental changes, toxins and contaminants, and disease.”

Swedish journalist Patrik Svensson has a more dire take on the European eel: “According to most research reports, the situation today is more or less catastrophic. The eel is dying, and not just in the expected way, as the natural end to a long life full of changes. It’s becoming extinct. We are losing it.”

Eels cannot be bred successfully in captivity. As a result, Asian aquaculture farms depend on a supply of elvers to produce their adult stock for the commercial market.

Overfishing to satisfy the Asian demand is one significant factor in the depletion of Atlantic eel stocks. Having overfished the Pacific population of Japanese eels and no longer able to meet home demand, Asian buyers turned to Europe, where they cleaned out the fishery of adult eels and elvers. Export is now tightly regulated but fuels a lucrative black market. They then turned to the U.S.

Brad Chase, a Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) senior marine fisheries biologist and diadromous fish project leader, said in response to demand from Japan in the mid-seventies, there was a big commercial push to harvest eels. The price for yellow eels went from fifty cents a pound to \$2. One pound of elvers could fetch more than \$2,000.

Only South Carolina and Maine now allow the sale of elvers. The fishery is tightly controlled but poaching is a constant threat.

“We had some large catches in the mid and late-seventies, into the early eighties, and then the catches just crashed,” Chase said.

“And we haven’t recovered from that even though we now have a lot more conservation measures in place for eels, and there are a lot fewer people trying to catch them.”

Chase said, “I’ve been involved with a stock assessment, and the assessment wasn’t able to identify why we’re at historically low levels, not just in Massachusetts but along the east coast.”

Asked what Islanders could do to help eels, Chase said, “Isolate a few locations on the Vineyard where you might be able to increase their passage to nursery habitats.”

Chase added, “One thing I’ve learned is that dam removals are really good for American eels. Eels do not do great going against velocities. Even low dams require them to use energy and aggregate where they’re vulnerable to predation.”

In the past fifteen years, DMF has been installing “eel ramps” that act like fish ladders and have provided passage for eels where dams block access, Chase said.

Today, the average American is most likely to encounter eel in a tackle shop, where it is sold live and is prime bait for striped bass, or at a sushi bar where unagi, a slice of grilled eel on rice, is sold for top dollar.

DMF regulations currently allow recreational fishermen to take 25 eels per day a minimum of nine inches in length.

Commercial fishermen have no harvest limit but there is a state quota set by the ASMFC.

Chase said many fishermen trap eels to use for striped bass bait. “In just one or two human generations we’ve gotten away from using them as food,” he said.

Sara Rademaker, an enterprising woman in Maine, wants to put locally raised eel back on American dinner plates.

Rademaker is the founder of [American Unagi](#), the only land-based eel aquaculture farm in the United States.

Currently, most of Maine's glass eels are exported to Asia to be grown and then imported back to the US. American Unagi has a license to harvest two hundred pounds of glass eels annually. The company raises eels in tanks to marketable size. In addition to selling live eels to high-end chefs in nearby cities, the company sells live, smoked, and frozen eels online.

A new generation of Islanders is turning to the sea to farm oysters, kelp, quahogs, even bay scallops. Might eels be next?

Chase said he’s met the owners of American Unagi and would like to see them be successful. Their example may point the way for Massachusetts aquaculturists as well, he said

“It would be good to see a little more appreciation for eel as food than just for bait. It might help the push for sustainable management and restoration efforts,” he said. “Smoked eel can be fantastic.”





Kristopher Kuhn Chairman  
American Eel Board Members  
Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 North Highland St, Suite 200A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201

April 2024

RE: Glass Eel Draft Addendum

In regards to the Addendum VI. The Maine Elver Fisherman Association indorses Option 1, No Sunset. The State of Maine has implemented many new laws, and management actions sense 2012. They have implement a swipe cards to get real time data and stopped people from fishing illegally.

They have changed how Eel buyers, ship Glass Eels for export. A marine patrol officer has to be present when the buyer is packing the elvers. A Maine Marine Warden tapes up the box to show that it was approved be the Marine Patrol. If that seal is broken USFWS know that the shipment has been tampered with, there are other controls use to insure this is the best run fishery in the state of Maine.

With the fisherman being on an individual quota, they don't fish most river and brook systems in Maine. There are 425 licensed fishermen, with over 6000 stream and over 200 rivers. Most of the fishermen had caught their quota before the glass eels start running in a lot of the river in the months of May and June. None of the hundreds of miles brooks get fished. The Maine Glass Eel fishermen have done everything that was asked of them by ASMFC & the State of Maine.

The State of Maine, & NGOs has opening up over 20000, acres of habit. Thought dam removals Fish passage. Addendums IV and V has conservation measures in them, we hope these measures are also considered in Addendum VI.

We ask at this time that the Eel Management Board grant Maines Glass Eel Fisherman the Conservative quote out lined in Addendum III IV &V at this time, please see attach habit opening sheet and previous comments Maine. This would be Setting the new quote to 11749 Pounds for the year 2024 and beyond for Maines Glass Eel Fishermen

Sincerely on behave of the Maine Elver Fishermen's Association

Darrell Young  
Founder & Executive Director

**Selected Summary of Coastal River and Stream Restoration Activities  
2012-2023**

<b>Restoration Activity</b>	<b>Waterway</b>	<b>River Miles</b>	<b>Lake Acres</b>	<b>Year</b>
Fishway	Flander's Stream	9	534	2012
Patten Stream Fishway	Union River Bay	20	1,200	2016
Wight's Pond Fishway	Bagaduce River		191	2017
Pierce Pond Fishway	Bagaduce River		110	2017
Cooper's Mill Dam Removal	Sheepscot River	20	700	2018
Dam Removal	Smelt Brook, Frenchman Bay	1.5		2018
Dam Removal	Branch Lake Stream, Union River	5		2019
Head tide dam passage	Sheepscot River	95	3,377	2019
Saccarappa Dam removal	Presumpscot River	5		2019
Fishway	Togus Pond		648	2019
Fishway Reconstruction	Pennamaquan River	2.5		2020
Fish passage/dam removal	China Lake	6.8	3,850	2020
Walker Pond Fishway	Bagaduce River		692	2020
Culvert removal	Jellison Brook, Union River	12		2020
Fish passage improvement	Cobbosseecontee River		20	2020
Frost Pond bridge	Bagaduce River	5	144	2021
Fishway construction	Denny's River		10,481	2022
Walton's Mill Dam removal	Temple Stream	52		2022
Seal Cove Pond Fishways	Blue Hill Bay		299	2022
Milltown Dam Removal	Schoodic River	10		2023
Branch Pond Outlet Dam	Sheepscot River		325	2023
Baskahegan Lake	Penobscot River	137	9,000	2023
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>380.8</b>	<b>31,571</b>	

## Stock Enhancement Activity Summary

From 2012 to 2016 six major restoration and habitat enhancement activities were completed on the Lower Penobscot River and its major tributaries (the Stillwater and Piscataquis Rivers) as part of the Penobscot River Restoration Project. Collectively these projects directly reconnected over 1,000 river miles and nearly 75% of the area of the Penobscot River Watershed (*Strategic Plan for the Restoration of Diadromous Fishes to the Penobscot River* Maine resource agencies, March 2008) and are the result of major investments from State, Federal, and Tribal governments and nongovernmental organizations.

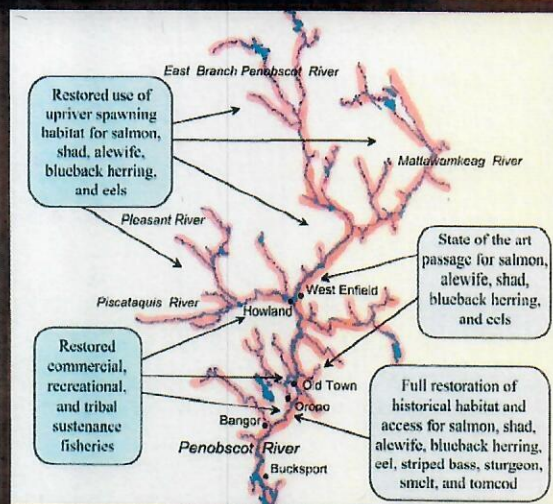
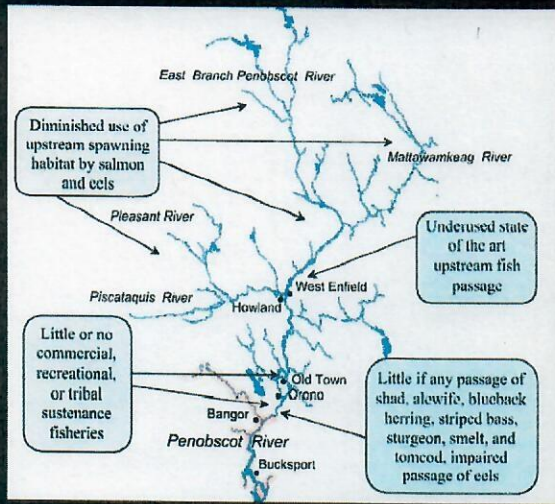
### Summary of Major Activities of the Penobscot River Restoration Project:

Activity	Year	Passage Direction
Veazie Dam Removal	2013	up/down
Great Works Dam Removal	2012	up/down
Howland Bypass	2015	up/down
Milford fish lift	2014	up
Orono Dam eel passage	2014	up/down
Stillwater dam eel passage	2016	up/down

These mainstem passage improvements reconnected a watershed drained by over 1,600 miles of river and streams, and over 600 lakes with 254,600 acres of surface area (*Strategic Plan for the Restoration of Diadromous Fishes to the Penobscot River* Maine resource agencies, March 2008).

Supporting work throughout the watershed continues to reconnect smaller tributaries and sub-drainages and is guided and funded by State, Federal, and Tribal governments and nongovernmental organizations.

# Penobscot River Restoration Project Before and After Habitat Access



Map by the Natural Resource Council of Maine:  
<https://www.nrcm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HabitatAccessbeforeandafterPRRP.pdf>

**Sources:**

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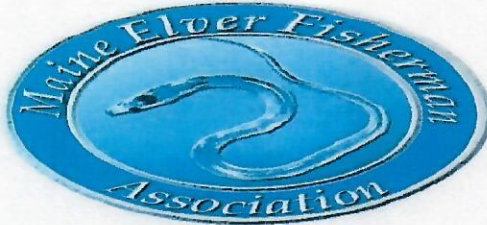
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<https://www.mainebiz.biz/article/dam-upgrade-brings-cobbosseecontee-watershed-closer-to-commercial-fishing>

<https://atlanticsalmonrestoration.org/projects/walker-pond-bagaduce-river-restoration-project>



September 29, 2023

**American Eel Board**  
**Chairman Phillip Edwards III**  
**Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission**  
1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201

**RE: Additional information for the ASMFC concerning stock enhancement and quota increase for Maine's Glass Eel fishery under Addendum IV to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel.**

Commissioners,

In July, we provided the rationale for reviewing and increasing the glass eel quota for fishermen in Maine waters. At that time, we provided a summary of restoration activities solely on the main stem of the Penobscot River completed since 2012. Included here is a selected summary of fish passage improvements that have taken place on other waterways in Maine since 2012. Please note, that there have been many other fish passage improvements in the region during this time that are not shown in this table. We plan on submitting further summaries that will help quantify these projects.

The summary attached includes dam removals, fishway constructions, and passage improvements that have impacted 380 miles of river and stream and over 35,000 lake acres. American eels, at various stages of their life cycle, benefit from these projects.

Thank you for reviewing this information and for continuing to consider our request.

On behalf of the Elver Fisherman Association of Maine,

Darrell Young  
President, Maine Elver Fishermen's Association



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201  
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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** American Eel Management Board

**FROM:** Caitlin Starks, Senior FMP Coordinator

**DATE:** April 22, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Public Comment on Draft Addendum VII to the American Eel Fishery Management Plan

The following pages represent a draft summary of all public comments received by ASMFC on American Eel Draft Addendum VII as of 11:59 PM (EST) on March 24, 2024 (closing deadline).

Comment totals for the Draft Addendum are provided in the table below, followed by summaries of the state public hearings, and written comments sent by organizations and individuals. A total of 10 written comments were received. These included 1 letter from an organization, and the remainder from individual industry stakeholders and concerned citizens. Six public hearings were held; four were virtual, two were in person, and one was hybrid. The total public attendance across the six hearings was 37 people, though some individuals attended multiple public hearings. A total of 23 public comments were provided during the public hearings.

The following tables are provided to give the Board an overview of the support for each of the management options contained in Draft Addendum VII. Comment totals for comments provided during public hearings are organized by the hearing at which they were provided; some individuals attended hearings outside their home state. It should also be noted that some individuals provided comments at a public hearing and also submitted written comments, and these are counted separately in the tables below. Additional comments that did not indicate support for a particular option are included in the public hearing summaries and written comments. Prevailing themes from the comments are highlighted below, including general considerations and rationales for support or opposition.

**Table 1. Total Written Comments Submitted to ASMFC**

Total Comments Received	
Total Form Letters	0
Organization Letters	1
Individual Comments	9
<b>Total Written Comments</b>	<b>10</b>



**Table 2. Public Hearing Attendance and Comments**

Public Hearings	# Attendees	# Comments
NH ( <i>Virtual</i> )	3	0
NY ( <i>Virtual</i> )	2	0
NJ ( <i>Virtual</i> )	8	3
MD ( <i>In person</i> )	13	12
DE ( <i>Hybrid</i> )	10	7
VA ( <i>In person</i> )	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>23</b>

**Table 3. Total Comments in Support of Each Option**

Options	Public Hearings						Written Comments	Organization Letter	Total
	NH	NY	NJ	MD	DE	VA			
3.1-1 (SQ)				12	7		8	1	28
3.1-2									0
3.1-3									0
3.1-4									0
3.1-5						1			1
3.1.2-1 (SQ)					3				3
3.1.2-2									0
3.2-1				3	2		1		6
3.2-2				3					3
3.3-1 (SQ)					3				3
3.3-2									0
3.4-1 (SQ)					3				3
3.4-2									0
3.5-1 (SQ)					3				3
3.5-1									0

Prevailing themes from the public comments on Addendum VII are summarized below.

**General Comments**

- Changes to the yellow eel management program are unnecessary at this time.
- Many of those who favor the Status Quo coastwide cap said that if that is not an option and the Board has to make a change, the next preferred option is Option 5, for the coastwide cap of 716,497 pounds.
- There has been a drastic reduction in fishing effort since the 1980s due to market changes, farmed eels, availability of bait, and the price of fuel.
- The data for assessing eel abundance are unreliable and more effort should be put into collecting better data.
- Catch per unit effort (CPUE) data would be more reliable if they were collected by eel fishermen who have experience.

- Recruit abundance suggests the health of the population and reproductive success.
- Some expressed concerns about illegal catch of undersized eels and shipments to foreign aquaculture markets negatively impacting the yellow eel market.
- Eel catch would improve if horseshoe crab harvest were allowed in New Jersey.

***Rationales for 3.1, Issue 1 Option 1. (Status Quo Coastwide Cap)***

- The Maryland Watermen’s Association members support Status Quo because yellow eel does not have an overfished or overfishing status, and changes in catch are controlled by the market. Maintaining the quota would allow for growth and better economic opportunities in the yellow eel industry, as well as preservation of the cultural and environmental heritage of the industry in Maryland.
- The yellow eel market in Virginia has disappeared in the last 15 years except for a limited recreational bait market, primarily for Cobia fishing during the summer months. The only eel buyer in the Northern Neck went out of business because the wholesale market for American Eel disappeared to nearly zero, mainly due to overseas aquaculture. There is no need to reduce the cap when they are not overfishing the species but rather are barely fishing it at all.
- The current cap is sufficient for limiting the fishery to sustainable levels. Lowering it would not allow for regrowth of the fishery if market conditions improve.
- A restrictive cap will affect Maryland crabbers, especially those who rely on eel as trotline bait.
- Crabbers are struggling to keep crab bait in their pots because of the overabundant population of eels eating their bait.
- There is not high demand for eel and fishing effort has been low so there is not a need to change the cap unless effort increases.
- Decreases in effort are also related to fewer fisherman having the ability to afford bait and fuel, and the inability to get good bait.
- The cap should stay the same until data from after COVID are included in the model.

***Rationales for 3.2, Option 1 (Three Years before Updating Cap)***

- The cap should be evaluated again in three years rather than five, because it is likely that changes in the indices would result improved catch recommendations.

***Rationales for 3.4, Option 1 (Status Quo CPUE Data Collection Requirements)***

- Several comments expressed concern about making the collection of harvester CPUE data optional because they see these data as important for assessing the stock and fishery.

## **American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings**

*New Jersey Webinar Hearing*

*February 20, 2024*

*8 Public Participants*

Commissioners: Joe Cimino (NJ), Jeff Kaelin (NJ), Cheri Patterson (NH), Doug Grout (NH), Kris Kuhn (PA), Chris Wright (NOAA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Kristen Anstead (ASMFC), Jeff Brust (NJ), Jen Pyle (NJ), Heather Corbett (NJ), Nichola Meserve (MA),

### Hearing Overview

- One individual did not support the status quo option for the yellow eel coastwide cap.
- Comments were made on decreased landings being related to market factors and reduced effort rather than eel abundance.

### Public Comment Summary

#### **Tom Fote (NJ)**

- Does not support status quo, but has no preference for other options
- It is concerning that management has not looked at how climate change will affect eel as a species. On the coast it takes 18 years for eels to grow up and start spawning. In that amount of time changes in the gulf stream could affect the overall population. We should be looking at this more broadly in terms of climate resiliency, rather than looking at it in a vacuum. In the last 70 years there have been shifts in lots of species. We should be ultra conservative because of the lack of information.

#### **William Ruakete**

- Based in New Jersey, and imports eels from other countries. Landings in 2015 and beyond were significantly down because of COVID. No one fished during COVID.

#### **Charles Franklin**

- The addendum should consider that the timing of eel migration could be changing due to climate change and that could impact the fishery independent survey results.

<b>New Jersey Webinar Hearing Attendance</b>		
<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
Barry	Kratchman	barrykratchman@aol.com
Charles	Franklin	charlesfranklin8240@gmail.com
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Douglas	Grout	groutnhfish@gmail.com
G	F	graciejfishng@gmail.com
Harry	Franklin	Hfranklin6473@gmail.com
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Nichola	Meserve	nmeserve@gmail.com
Samuel	Veach	bveach1977@gmail.com
Tom	Fote	tfote@jcaa.org
William	Raukete	swraukete@comcast.net

**American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings**

*New Hampshire Webinar Hearing*

*February 27, 2024*

*3 Public Participants*

Commissioners: Cheri Patterson (NH), Doug Grout (NH), Kris Kuhn (PA), Chris Batsavage (NC)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Delayne Brown (NH), Renee Zobel (NH), Robert Atwood (NH), Todd Mathes (NC)

Hearing Overview

- No public comments provided

<b>New Hampshire Webinar Hearing Attendance</b>		
<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
Cheri	Patterson	cheri.patterson@wildlife.nh.gov
Chris	Batsavage	chris.batsavage@deq.nc.gov
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Debra	Abercrombie	debra_abcrombie@fws.gov
Delayne	Brown	delayne.t.brown@wildlife.nh.gov
Doug	Grout	groutnhfish@gmail.com
Jerry	Morgan	b8ntackle@aol.com
Kris	Kuhn	kkuhn@pa.gov
Renee	Zobel	Renee.Zobel@wildlife.nh.gov
Robert	Atwood	robert.atwood@wildlife.nh.gov
Todd	Mathes	todd.mathes@deq.nc.gov

**American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings**

*New York Webinar Hearing*

*March 5, 2024*

*2 Public Participants*

Commissioners: John Maniscalco (NY), Martin Gary (NY), Kris Kuhn (PA), Chris Wright (NOAA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Caitlin Craig (NY), Jesse Hornstein (NY), Jessica Best (NY), Lt. James Cullen (MA), Todd Mathes (NC), Wes Eakin (NY)

Hearing Overview

- No public comments provided

<b>New York Webinar Hearing Attendance</b>		
<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
Martin	Gary	martin.gary@dec.ny.gov
Bill	Chace	Sailorbill1954@gmail.com
Caitlin	Craig	Caitlin.craig@dec.ny.gov
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Jesse	Hornstein	jesse.hornstein@dec.ny.gov
Jessica	Best	jessica.best@dec.ny.gov
John	Maniscalco	john.maniscalco@dec.ny.gov
Kris	Kuhn	kkuhn@pa.gov
Lt. James	Cullen	james.cullen@mass.gov
Susan	Case	susanpcase@gmail.com
Todd	Mathes	todd.mathes@deq.nc.gov
Wes	Eakin	william.eakin@dec.ny.gov

## **American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings**

*Virginia Public Hearing*

*March 7, 2024*

*1 Public Participant*

Commissioners: Pat Geer (VA), Shanna Madsen (VA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Joshua McGilly (VA)

### Hearing Overview

- One participant preferred Option 5 under Section 3.1, Issue 1
- There was a lot of discussion on issues in Virginia related to poaching and black market activity for glass eels, and the need for additional enforcement

### Comment Summary

#### **Timothy Rivera (Eel dealer)**

- Supports Option 5 under Section 3.1, Issue 1
- Does not prefer one of the options under Section 3.2
- It isn't hard to catch eels, it is just hard to sell them. Has had to turn a lot of his catch loose because they won't sell.
- Thinks if the coastwide cap were 700 thousand pounds, the landings wouldn't get to that level. On the other end of the spectrum if it is set to 200 thousand pounds, he thinks people will just not report all of their landings to not go over it. He thinks enforcement won't figure it out because in 20 years he has never been checked by VMRC. Doesn't see them checking the eelers and the crabbers for compliance, but the oyster fishermen get checked all the time.
- There are also issues with reporting. Not everything is getting reported because there are a lot of cash deals that don't have a paper trail.
- There have to be baby eels to get yellow eels, so it doesn't make sense to reduce harvest of the yellow eels when we are not limiting the glass eel fisheries, or not stopping illegal harvest of glass eels.
- There are really only three eel buyers on this half of the country, and now the market for yellow eel is just for recreational fisheries. If the cobia season closes, there won't be any more eel catch.
- The eel fishery in Virginia is declining still, and he is the last buyer. If he gets out of it and there are no more buyers, the Virginia eel fishery will be done.





## **American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings**

*Maryland Public Hearing*

*March 12, 2024*

*13 Public Participants*

Commissioners: Lynn Fegley (VA), Russel Dize (VA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Carrie Kennedy (MD), Alexis

### Hearing Overview

- 12 attendees preferred Option 1, Status Quo, under section 3.1, Issue 1 (coastwide cap).
- 3 attendees stated that if there must be a reduction, then the preferred option is Option 5 for the coastwide cap.
- 3 attendees supported Section 3.2, Option 1 for the 3-year timeframe for yellow eel provisions, and 3 supported Option 2 for 5 years.
- Most attendees spoke about the lack of market being the cause of the decreased landings and effort in the yellow eel fishery. They do not believe these trends are related to reduced abundance of eels.
- Comments were also made about the impacts of invasive blue catfish on eel populations and the fishery (they will often get in traps and eat everything in there), as well as cormorants.

### Comment Summary

#### **Dale Shaner (MD)**

- Supports coastwide cap Option 1, and timeframe Option 2 (5 years)
- Eel catch is down because there is no market, and fishery has reduced effort

#### **Irving Chappelle (Fisherman)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap for the same reasons mentioned before

#### **Troy Wilkins (Eel fisherman)**

- Supports status quo, 5 years
- In my county there are several eelers and also clambers that dig bait. If we can't fish, they can't dig bait and it will affect them too.
- I think it will affect charter boats in the bay, because while the eel exports are down, a lot of their market is for striped bass and cobia bait, so it will affect those fishermen also.

#### **Bill Legg (Fisherman)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap

#### **Dean Price (Fisherman)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap

#### **Tim Mortus (Vice President, Maryland Watermen's Association)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap

- Too much of this approach is based on landings. If you look at landings in early 1980s, when European eel was depleted, our landings went up. When they started landing European eel in Scandinavia, our landings went down.
- Also, exported eel from the US are growing in ponds all over the world now. Those eels, and what is coming from Scandinavia are filling the market. Our landings are low not because there are no eels but because they don't need our landings anymore if it is easier and cheaper for them to get European eel to Asia than American eel to Asia.
- There will be a time in the future when the market will need eel from the US, so we need the coastwide cap to stay the same for that day.

**Robert T. Brown (President, Maryland Watermen's Association)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap
- We have a large volume of eels in the state of Maryland. There is too much emphasis on the harvest data. The harvest is down because the number of pots being set is down, there are fewer eelers, and the market. Marketing is the reason why we are not harvesting more eels. We can't move our product.
- We have been more conservative than anyone else out there, and we are getting no credit for being conservative. And you want to penalize us for not harvesting the eels because we don't have a market; that is a double penalty.
- Once the cap is reduced there is no room for anybody who wants to buy and sell eels.
- One of the problems is this eel is being micromanaged, and the ASMFC is missing the point that we aren't harvesting the eels.
- Maryland only does their survey in one spot on the Sassafras River, and there are three surveys up the in Hudson River. We need more survey locations in the Chesapeake Bay to get a better stock assessment. In the Sassafras there are a lot of blue catfish, and they are dominating our bay.
- The cormorants are a big problem. There are so many, and they are the best eelers there are. That needs to be addressed because they are interfering with our industry.

**Victoria Brown (Treasurer, St. Mary's County Watermen's Association)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap, and timeframe Option 2 (5 years)
- I don't believe  $I_{TARGET}$  is a justified system or a proven scientific place for this data. It doesn't make sense that we are basing it off of catch history, reporting, and only one survey in the State of Maryland where there aren't any eels.
- When the market comes back, the watermen need to have a place to sell the eels

**Barry Kratchman (Delaware Valley Fish Company)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap, but if the Board insists on a reduction at this time, then Option 5 might be a somewhat acceptable compromise. For the timeframe under 3.2 he supports Option 1 (3 years).
- There are too little data to assess the abundance. More recent data should be included in the model before using it.
- It is not just the market affecting fishery effort, but bait and fuel costs are all time highs.
- There could be a market in the future so we want to preserve that opportunity.
- The Board and Technical Committee should solicit participation from the industry to help with surveys, and folks would be willing to give their time. Fourteen surveys is not enough to estimate the abundance.

**Steve Lay**

- In favor of status quo for the coastwide cap, but if there has to be a change would support Option 5. Would also support Option 1 (3 years) under Section 3.2 because he believes more current data will help the watermen out.
- There is not data on the young of year eels that go to the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean and South America. You are asking the Chesapeake Bay watermen to take a hit and protect the eels, when you don't have any data from other areas.

**Moochie Gilmer (Clammer)**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap, but if there has to be a change would prefer Option 5 over the others. Supports Option 1 under Section 3.2 (3 years).
- His business is as a clammer, and he sells clams as bait to the eelers. From dealing with eelers for many years, he knows about the changes they made to be more conservative before anyone else, and so he supports status quo.

**Russel Dize (Maryland Governor's Appointee)**

- In favor of status quo for the coastwide cap
- Does not think we are going to get status quo, but thinks it is important for the Maryland watermen to stay together in support of status quo so it gives them a position to negotiate. When we go to negotiate with the other states, the northern states don't have fisheries, and will likely vote in a block. The southern states probably won't vote. So we will leave New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, PFRC, and Virginia, to decide what the option is going to be.
- There is too much emphasis on CPUE. It is not a good way to manage because the effort is already down.
- Haiti shipped 100 thousand pounds of glass eels to Hong Kong last year. Dominica shipped 10 thousand pounds. All of those eels are not going to come back. You are blaming the wrong people. It is not the yellow eel fishery to blame, it is the glass eel.



## American Eel Draft Addendum VII Public Hearings

*Delaware Public Hearing*

*March 13, 2024*

*10 Public Participants (3 in person, 7 online)*

Commissioners: John Clark (DE), Chris Wright (NOAA)

ASMFC & State Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Kristen Anstead (ASMFC), Margaret Conroy (DNREC), Jordan Zimmerman (DNREC), Alexis Park (MD DNR), Todd Mathes (NC DMF)

### Hearing Overview

- 7 attendees commented in favor of Option 1, Status Quo, under section 3.1, Issue 1 (coastwide cap).
  - 3 of these supported status quo for all of the options being considered.
- 2 attendees commented in favor of Option 1 under section 3.2 (three years).

### Comment Summary

#### **Robert Piascinski**

- In favor of status quo for 3.1 on Issues 1 and 2.
- In favor of Option 1 (three years) for Section 3.2.
- Landings are down at least 65% from what we are allowed to catch. I don't see a reason for there to be any changes. If there is a problem, it is not caused by fishermen.

#### **Joseph Smith**

- Supports status quo for all of the options in the Addendum.
- The data are biased toward landings, and the landings are not good because the market is not good.

#### **Larry Voss**

- Supports status quo for all options.
- With no market, and the bait issue of not being able to use female horseshoe crab as bait, landings took a hit.
- If the market ever does come back, we will go over the current cap because there are more eels now than there have been in a long time.

#### **Mike Stansky**

- Supports status quo for all options.
- Biggest issues are the costs of bait, and lack of market. If we can't sell the eels, we are not going to catch them.
- Crabbers are complaining about eels eating all of the bait in their pots.

#### **Bill Clayton**

- Supports status quo.
- We have gone from over 279 fisherman to probably about 80 fishermen on the east coast in the past 10 years. The market for eel is not there. As an eel buyer, he has to limit the fishermen to

catch days to fish. There is only so much I can buy, and the distribution chain can take. When the fishing gets hard, he pays the guys very well for low catches, which shows up in the catch effort as low CPUE.

- For eel it is primarily for the bait market now. The bait market runs when the kids are out of school, and it is tied intricately to striped bass and cobia quotas.
- Because we did not have a hard quota, he started importing eel to stress off the domestic stock. Eel farms in the US are also taking away market share from fishermen.
- It is disconcerting to see the number of families that will be hurt by this if it is anything other than status quo.

**Barry Kratchman (Delaware Valley Fish Company)**

- The data suggests that the industry has really backed off the fishing of eel. We don't have the data for 2021, 2022, and 2023. There should be no change until we update the data.
- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap, but if something needs to be done, I would go with Option 5. The Cap of 716,497 pounds would not be good for the fishermen, but it shouldn't go lower than that.
- Supports Option 1 under 3.2. Thinks that it should be reevaluated in three years because if the abundance increases, and the market changes, the fishermen should be allowed to go back to fishing more.

**Mitchell Feigenbaum**

- Supports status quo for the coastwide cap. If not status quo, then the highest alternative cap is preferred.
- Appreciates the stock assessment and peer review being published so we are better informed.

Delaware Webinar Hearing Attendance		
First Name	Last Name	Email Address
Kristen	Anstead	kanstead@asmfc.org
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Chris	Wright	chris.wright@noaa.gov
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Barry	Kratchman	bk@classiccake.com



## **ASMFC DRAFT ADDENDUM VII TO THE AMERICAN EEL INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN.**

### **# high yellow eel abundance regime in 1974-1987**

Starting from the seventies I have been involved in the eel industry, in this period, the eel industry was quite prominent, with North Carolina actively promoting eel fishing.

The fact that close to a hundred commercial fishermen were involved in eel fishing in North Carolina alone and in our Northern neighboring states in even larger numbers reflects the significance of the industry. We had fishermen with just a few eel traps to fishermen in Maryland using long lines exceeding 1,000 traps. The most productive eel fishermen lived like a long-distance truck driver together with his crew following the eel migration they spared no expenses, supported by an on-land person who's only job it is was to collect from a far a distance the RIGHT bait needed their CPU was in a different class altogether with as much as 5x more productive per unit effort.

There were approximately 8 eel buyer / exporters competing and there must have been over 40,000 active eel traps spanning from Maine to Florida, it underscores the scale of eel harvesting along the East Coast during that time.

### **# a low regime in 1988-1999**

The fluctuating dynamics in the market, coupled with issues such as fishermen being put on hold played a significant role in the decline of interest among fishermen.

A drastic reduction of around 80% in the total number of commercial fishermen engaged in eel fishing compared to the seventies and early eighties reflects the significant impact of these challenges. Most decided to leave the commercial fishing industry altogether due to the uncertainties and difficulties.

The decrease in the number of active eel traps on the East Coast went from over 40,000 to approximately 15,000 and with an eel industry reduced to only three eel buyers / exporters, further emphasizes the challenges and changes in the industry during that time.

### **# even lower regime in 2000-2020.**

A depressed market resulted in consolidation with only one remaining buyer / exporter left has had with the exception of the last few years, implications for eel prices, which remained stagnant at mid-nineties levels for the most part of these two decades, add COVID into this equation we see an extreme fishing effort decline.

#### **2.4.3 Catch per Unit Effort**

##### **CPUE can be used as an index to estimate relative abundance for a population.**

Even first-class eel fishermen have been humbled often, fishing with eel traps is an art that takes skills acquired over time. CPUE eel data is by default arbitrary as it is fundamentally compromised as it depends on out-of-control factors. Next to the latter there is a significant difference between commercial fishermen active in eel fishing and an eel fisherman. An eel fisherman CPU is in a different class, with as much as 5x more productive CPU, who, what and where are you measuring makes a world of difference.



## Proof of a healthy eel population

The public consent is that eels are overexploited, however only the USA and Canada have an eel habitat territory that can sustain a large eel population. The Caribbean eel habitat is very limited, consequence 99.9% of their baby eel recruitment couldn't survive even if no baby eel fishery existed. Regardless of their baby eel fishing activities they still have elvers coming from the ocean (*no market value, therefore home free as far as the fishery concerns*), going upstream year a round populating the Caribbean rivers and hereby contributing to the next generation. The Canadian, Maine and Caribbean baby eel harvest are the "Canaries in the coalmine" an acknowledgement of a healthy or not so healthy eel population rooted in the U.S.A. and Canada is the only reliable eel population data available for all of us to see.

The phenomenon of recent abundance baby eel recruitment exceeding in volume of the nineties is a contradicting of the ASMFC narrative, proving that ASMFC data collection including the adult eel population is **fundamentally flawed**. A one-year heavy baby eel recruitment can be a fluke but two years in a row is starting to look more like a trend and if 2024 is no different it is a solid established trend.

The abundance of baby eel recruitments in 2022 and 2023 are the direct result from by the ASMFC period called **# even lower regime in 2000-2020**. It is obviously that the adult eel fishery didn't hurt the silver eel migration during this period. In contrast in the nineties with a baby eel recruitment fewer in numbers this recruitment was a direct result of the silver eel migration during the by the ASMFC period called **# high yellow eel abundance regime in 1974-1987**.

We all can see the contradiction here you can't have it both ways, calling the period of **high yellow eel abundance regime in 1974-1987** while this period produced a fraction of the offspring compared to the most recent abundance of baby eel recruitment period and calling the latter period **an even lower regime in 2000 to 2020**.

As pointed out here the problem isn't the adult eel industry **the problem lays fundamentally with the fact that the ASMFC** is not having access to the right tools to assess the eel population.

## Conclusion

Instead of more restrictions what is needed is acknowledging that the adult eel fishery is a twentieth century antiquated industry an unreliable data source for the twentieth first century.

**BABY EEL RECRUITMENT DATA REFLECTS THE NORTH AMERICAN EEL POPULATIONS HEALTH NOT THE OTHERWAY AROUND.**

ASMFC and industry would be much better serviced in converting partially the adult eel fishery quota into a controlled baby eel fishery benefitting "**data collection**" at **FIXED** locations, filling a data vacuum, creating a win-win as explained in my previously submitted public comments.

"Abraham Maslow" To the man who only has a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail.

ASMFC needs to take a pause in further unnecessary not needed restrictions and instead focusing on implementing a very much needed data collection reform fitting for the twentieth first century.

Thanks, for your time and your consideration.

Willy Bokelaar [emergo22@hotmail.com](mailto:emergo22@hotmail.com)

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** rbrown marylandwatermen.com <rbrown@marylandwatermen.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, March 22, 2024 9:06 AM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] ASMFC Yellow Eel Board Proposed Quota  
**Attachments:** MWA Itr ASMFC Yellow Eel 2024.docx

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

Please find attached a letter in opposition to the Yellow Eel Quota for Coast Wide Harvest.

Very Respectfully,

Victoria M Brown  
For the Boards  
Maryland Watermen's Association, Inc.



# The Maryland Watermen's Association, Inc.

21 March 2024

Subject: Proposed decrease to the Yellow Eel Quota by the ASMFC

The Maryland Watermen's Association, Inc has polled the Board of Directors and Executive Committee and has unanimously voted to support the Status Quo and urges the ASMFC Commission not to cut any Yellow Eel Quota. Considering that the Yellow Eel Fishery has not been overfished or overfishing has not occurred, there should be no reason to alter the Coastwide Quota at this time.

Harvest records should not be used to even consider a cut to the quota, it is the market that controls what has been caught. Reducing the quota at this time would only discourage future commercial harvest and reduce the chance of establishing this fishery.

The Maryland Watermen's Association urge you to support Status Quo and to encourage growth in the Yellow Eel Industry, strengthen economic opportunities and preserve the cultural and environmental heritage associated with Yellow Eel harvesting in the State of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

For the Board

**VICTORIA M BROWN**

MARYLAND WATERMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.

1805A VIRGINIA ST.  
ANNAPOLIS, MD 20626  
410-216-6610

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Jim Bright <jimbright99@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 17, 2024 8:34 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Yellow Eel Harvest Cap Draft Addendum

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

ASMFC,

I am a crabber from Maryland. Please consider the effect a restrictive cap will have on Maryland crabbers, especially crabbers who rely on eel as trotline bait. Please choose option 1, status quo, as there is not high demand for eel and fishing effort has been low. If effort increases, and catches are closer to the threshold, then I think it makes sense to reconsider the proposed caps/options.

Jim Bright

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** monkingboy@aol.com  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 24, 2024 2:59 PM  
**To:** Caitlin Starks  
**Subject:** [External] Yellow eel / Glass Eel harvest Addendum

Dear Caitlin Starks ,

My name is Edwin Chiofola ,

I haft to tell you that New York State fishermen have not been getting notifications of meetings that you people are holding ...

.. Maureen Davidson and John Maniscalco.. of NYS DEC did not notify the 20 or so fishermen that I know of, that fish eels here on Long Island at All...

How can you pass a law of any kind with out notification to the fisherman that fish in that fishery ?????

THERE IS SUPPOSED TO BE A IN HOUSE MEETING IN PERSON , COVID IS OVER ...

Never had that , and my lawyer has been notified of this ...

With that being said ...

I feel as tho , the eels should be left at status quo until you let the fisherman here in NY State actually what is going on ..???

I have fished eels for over 40 years , I know more about the American Yellow Eel then you can read in most books ..

The Other thing is that No State , has any control over how they spawn, because the eels spawn in the Sargo Sea in the Caribbean.. then the glass eels or elvers. Come up in the Gulf Stream and there is no control over that to any one state ..

SO , How can you control , something that the federal government or any State has no control over ???

If you are so worried about the eels then why give Maine more glass eel permits??

That makes no sense...

Leave it Status Quo until , further data is available..

Thank you for your time Caitlin Starks

Edwin Chiofola

PS please , Let NYS DEC know that they need to notify there fishmen about all meetings

And are to hold them in Person according to the law

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Rhonda Danna <radanna0230@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 20, 2024 7:28 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Fwd: EEL Webinar 2/20/24 6-8pm

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Rhonda Danna** <[radanna0230@gmail.com](mailto:radanna0230@gmail.com)>  
Date: Tue, Feb 20, 2024 at 7:26 PM  
Subject: EEL Webinar 2/20/24 6-8pm  
To: <[g2w2@asmfc.org](mailto:g2w2@asmfc.org)>

I have been a commercial waterman for 35 years . An attended webinar on 2/20/2024 and was unable to ask a question due to technical issues. How has it been in the last 3-5 years? Me along with other crabbers can;t keep crab bait in our pots because of the over abundance population of eels eating our bait . How can your stats be based on accurate information with landings When less fisherman have the ability to buy bait and afford fuel, the inability to get bait . Season must be evaluated by water temperatures .  
Accurate account should be by reports supplied by a waterman who actually caught eels.

Thank You ,

*Michael Finlaw Commercial Crabber New Jersey*

# DELAWARE VALLEY FISH COMPANY

*Specializing in Live and Fresh Frozen Seafood Worldwide*

From: Mitchell Feigenbaum  
To: ASMFC Eel Board, TC and AP  
Date: March 25, 2024  
Re: Commentary on Eel Addendum Options

Dear Colleagues -

I write to elaborate on the concerns expressed separately by my partner Barry Kratchman. We are disappointed that in a period of historic low effort, after imposing a coast wide cap near the bottom end of 50-year harvest levels, stock assessors, using a third new statistical model in as many assessments, now urge an option that could doom the U.S. yellow eel fishery to oblivion.

The newest stock assessment is particularly troubling because it depends on catch levels as a primary measure of abundance. Ironically, in my first visit to ASMFC in 2003 or 2004, I presented five years of catch information demonstrating stable harvest levels during that period. Thereafter, the TC stated that catch records are an inappropriate indicator of abundance without catch per unit effort (CPUE) data. This position is reflected in the historical records of the TC and the management board.

Now, twenty year later, in a single recommendation, the stock assessment subcommittee is proposing to reduce the eel cap by more than 70% from what was already a very conservative target, based on a catch-based model. Adding insult to injury, the plan development team is also proposing the elimination of mandatory CPUE data collection.

I am informed that, despite its name, the new model relies significantly on fishery-independent data, where available. What remains unsaid, however, is that most fishery-independent data collection comes from places where fishing effort has been centered for decades. Little information about abundance comes from the vast stretches of eel habitat throughout the coast where little or no eel fishing takes place. Moreover, very little fishery-independent data is gathered from surveys directed specifically towards eels. Often, it is just an afterthought in another survey.

On a different note, for three consecutive years the eel Advisory Panel has asked its coordinators to arrange an election for a new Chairperson. Our current AP Chair came from an NGO and was one of two North American scientists on an IUCN panel whose red-listing of American eel was rejected by the Fish and Wildlife Service nine years ago. She has been in the position for over five years. By contrast, the prior two AP Chairmen from industry were asked to step down after two or three years at most, to promote balanced leadership. A double standard is not fair.

In past years, our AP Chair was active during stock assessments and peer review, with a close eye on industry concerns. That type of scrutiny was not apparent during the most recent stock review. While the current Chair's voice on the AP is important and her style always respectful, the time to rotate the AP Chair is overdue.

In conclusion, the current coastwide cap is a prudent measure to keep eel catches at historically low levels. Dramatic reductions urged by the stock assessment subcommittee would be a radical step further. Watermen and women throughout the mid-Atlantic states rely on American eel as one several species they target off-and-on to make a living in the near-shore fishery. Presently they do not rely heavily on eel for their living. If the fishery is locked into the lowest target effort level for the foreseeable future, however, this commodity will not be commercially non-viable in the long run. Thus, we recommend status quo or option 5.

**M.F.**

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Mary Ferguson <mtf1952@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 20, 2024 6:57 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Cc:** Susan Case  
**Subject:** [External] Addendum VII Hearing Comments

I am approaching my 36th year of my eel rack on the Delaware River.  
About 10 years ago there were 9 permits issued. I am now only one of the last 2 weirs left that fishes for silver eel.

An average annual catch for me is 2,500 pounds per year. In 2023 I was flooded out only fishing for 21 of the 60 days of fishing. Based on my daily catch for those 21 days, I estimate the catch would have been 3,000 pounds. We have also had flooding for the past 6 years which yielded less pounds caught. As a result there are substantially less fishermen and eels caught and I recommend that the permits and rules remain the same.

Douglas Case  
Welcome Lake, PA  
[DouglasGCase@gmail.com](mailto:DouglasGCase@gmail.com)



# DELAWARE VALLEY FISH COMPANY

March 20, 2024

Attn: Caitlin Starks  
Senior Fish Management coordinator

Good Day,

My Name is Barry Kratchman and I am the third generation of the founder of Delaware Valley Fish and the current President. I have been involved at DVF for my entire life and proud of our 51 year history. Throughout our history we have witnessed ebbs and flow in the industry and currently the market has declined due to several factors, including farmed eels, availability of bait and the price of fuel. The market price is currently below the threshold for large scale fishing and we have experienced low effort since Covid in 2020.

Over the years I have been engaged in several state-wide meetings and have been in contact with many of the industry members. The industry accepted the Coast Wide Cap of 916K pounds and since its inception have not exceeded it. Currently catches are far below the cap and we are all diligently trying to understand the need for further reductions.

The US Fish and Wildlife has established in 2015 that the "eel stock is stable and does not require protection". Understanding that management of the species must continue and a responsible path must prevail, it is extremely difficult to predict the abundance of American Eel. The peer review panel has cautioned us on the lack of substantial data and how difficult estimating abundance is, in fact, the panel stated, "American Eel is depleted from all time levels in American waters and uncomfortable with overfished terminology because of the uncertainty in the assessment methods and do not believe a reliable determination could be defined at this time".

We all understand the Panmictic nature of American eel and the range from South America to Canada. The thousands of rivers they inhabit over thousands of miles. More importantly the peer review's opinion of the lack of correlation of fishing effort and abundance. I also applaud the peer review opinion that more indices are needed and the species is difficult asses. The most comprehensive data comes from Table 13 that list the 15 yellow eel indices in the response to the peer view. Interesting 3 of the indices come from the Hudson River (very low area of catches and represents 20% of the data). Models that suggest eliminating these surveys, because of the potential bias, show extremely stable abundance from 2000 to present (Figure 3 page 22).

Although the assessment has YOY indices they do not feed into the model and once again, it is of the peer review opinion that more indices be used. The YOY may not be a good indicator of abundance but certainly represent the health of the stock as recruitment is a strong indicator of

spawning occurring in the breeding area. There are several indicators of the heavy recruitment of YOY all through the US and Canada including record breaking numbers at the Conowingo Dam.

The last data fed into the models were from 2000 and earlier and I believe it is important to update the model before substantial management is suggested. I also believe adding more indicis over many life cycles would provide a better indication of the abundance and health of the species. In addition, surveying countries not in the US to determine their abundance and health would be instrumental in establishing the management of this panmictic species.

I implore the board to make no further management policy until the above-mentioned items are addressed and data is updated. If the board feels they must act then OPTION 5 (coast wide cap of 716,497) (Reference Period 1988-1999, Multiplier 1.25, and Threshold .5) would be the most responsible course until more data is collected. It would be important to reassess in 3 years not 5 and certainly, require YOY surveys from each state.

The future of several hundred families is at stake and would all hope that if the market changes viable decisions would allow the continuance of this multi -generational industry

Respectfully,

Barry Kratchman  
Delaware Valley Fish Co.  
[bk@dvfish.com](mailto:bk@dvfish.com)  
484-614-5574

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** Michael Lightfoot <jacksoncreek1152@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 6, 2024 12:57 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Va Twin Rivers Watermen's Assoc, Comments on American Eel Addendum VII

**Categories:** Replied but not sorted

The Va Twin Rivers Watermen's Assoc (VTRWA) has contacted numerous Va Watermen who USED to fish for American Yellow eel extensively throughout Va and Potomac tidal waters. We also spoke with the family members largest Eel buyer (Robberecht Wholesale Seafood) in the Northern Neck which closed nearly 15 years ago. The family states that the wholesale market for American Eel disappeared to nearly zero, many due to overseas aquaculture, and they went out of business..

In the past 15 years our market has disappeared except for a limited recreational bait market, primarily for Cobia fishing during the summer months. There is a very small retail market to the Asian communities in Richmond and Northern Virginia but this may be less than 5% of our catch today. Confirmation of this market collapse is stated in the ASMFC draft addendum document in paragraph 2.4.1 Coastwide Description.

In researching what has happened to our market, all indicators point to aquaculture, growing small eels in ponds and tanks in Asia and Europe. These facts are also stated in the draft addendum. Now we have the first US American Eel aquaculture company which opened in 2023, the American Unagi Corporation , Waldoboro, ME. which opened in 2023 [Our Farm - American Unagi](#). If illegal catch of undersized eels and shipments to foreign aquaculture markets could stop, we may have a chance for a small market return.

Based on the above data and that we are not overfishing this species, in fact we are barely fishing whatsoever. We recommend option 1 for Status Quo. Our watermen all state an abundance of mature eels in our waterways and we would welcome any market returns and help from ASMFC on curbing the illegal catch and shipping of small eels to overseas aquaculture markets.

A copy of this email is also being sent to ASMFC

Ed Arnest  
President VTRWA

## Caitlin Starks

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**From:** G2W2  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 20, 2024 8:47 AM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** FW: [External] Draft Addendum V11: Yellow Eel Harvest Cap

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**From:** Betty Veach <bveach1977@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 19, 2024 6:08 PM  
**To:** G2W2 <G2W2@asmfc.org>  
**Subject:** [External] Draft Addendum V11: Yellow Eel Harvest Cap

I ask that the ASMFC keep the 2023 Status Quo remain as is. If the catch has went down, I have listed reasons that may have caused the decline:

1. The cost for purchasing Out-Of-State crabs is \$4.00-4.50 per crab.
2. The average cost of gasoline is \$4.50/gal
3. A 3 gallon pail of pot paint cost \$420.00

These are reasons why a lot of eelers have stopped eeling and the total catch has decreased.

If you reopen the harvest of horseshoe crabs in NJ, you will see a significant increase in the catch.

Sincerely,  
Sam Veach