

SUDOANG SUDOANG

Promoting sustainable and concerted eel stock management in the SUDOE area

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1. INTRODUCTION

The “**Promoting the Concerted and Sustainable Management of Eels in the SUDOE area**” (Spain, France and Portugal) project (SOE2/P5/E0617), acronym **SUDOANG**, specifically seeks to “Strengthen the cooperation of the stakeholders involved in eel governance and their habitat in the SUDOE” area, by improving coordination and communication among eel managers at different levels and sectors, and by exploring new management approaches.

The "new governance" approach is the result of the progressive political, socio-economic, cultural, etc. complexity of an increasingly globalised world and which requires a new form of public governance. Some of the problems, such as climate change or the loss of biomass and biodiversity of the marine ecosystem, or the degradation of the aquatic habitats where the European eel lives, etc., cannot only be addressed from a local perspective (country, region). Broader, multi-stakeholder (public and private) approaches are needed, where all participants share the common goal of regenerating, recovering and conserving the eel population. In this regard, the setting up of a platform is a response that can positively contribute to solving the problem.

Achieving eel management that is agreed between countries and, therefore, more efficient, is not possible with the current highly fragmented management model.

SUDOANG will provide two tools for better knowledge of eel management in the SUDOANG area. Those tools are an interactive website and a governance platform resulting from the cooperation of the stakeholders working with eels and their habitat in France, Spain and Portugal. This is all to support eel management in the SUDOE area (Portugal, France and Spain).

The ground covered so far has allowed progress to be made in developing a proposal regarding the composition and structure of the governance platform (E8.2.1). Very briefly, the platform consists of the different partners and associates currently taking part in the project. From the organisational point of view, its structure is multilevel, i.e., a structure that will enable coordinated action between the Member States of the project and between each Member State and their respective regional and local authorities, within the framework of the European Union.

Once the platform is operational, it should aim to be recognised as a consultative and advisory body by decision-makers, at least in the countries participating in the project. This recognition will certainly encourage other stakeholders to take part in the project, as they see it as a useful and practical instrument for eel recovery.

It is also hoped that the platform will help to improve the dialogue and cooperation between the different stakeholders and between administrations, both national and international, which, prior to the setting up of the platform, did not exist or was very limited.

The Governance Platform should also facilitate the creation and coordination of participation forums in which the points of view and positions of the different stakeholders associated with the platform are gathered.

This **Recommendations Guide** aims to be an initial contribution to improving the management of the platform itself. The document includes those aspects that we consider essential for it to function properly and where the platform is conceived as the common space where the stakeholders most committed to eel recovery participate.

Sooner rather than later, we need to move towards future scenario where the "new governance" culture is part of the intellectual and attitudinal change needed to address complex issues, beyond the national and beyond the traditional participants.

Therefore, this guide seeks to steer the governance platform to being functional in these early stages, as well as to help to strengthen it. In short, these recommendations are intended to facilitate the incorporation of governance principles in the participation, coordination and management processes of the platform itself and to make it as inclusive, egalitarian and transparent as possible.

2. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND PERFORMANCE ON WHICH THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PLATFORM IS BASED

Governance Principles

The Governance Platform can ideally be a space for collaborative engagement between stakeholders with different interests and influence, but with a common goal: **eel recovery and conservation**.

This platform should aim to be governed by the principles of good governance. The choice of those principles is complex and controversial. In the case in question, we have selected the most common and representative governance principles. Specifically, some of which were proposed in an early (1995) UNDP publication, *“Public Sector Management, Governance, and Sustainable Human Development”*, in addition to those published in the European Union's White Paper on Good Governance (2001).

Undoubtedly, the application of those principles to the coordination, collaboration, participation and consultation in decision-making processes should contribute to make eel management more efficiency.

In these early stages, it is recommended that the governance principles to be applied to the internal management of the platform. These principles guide the interaction between the stakeholders involved in a process aimed at improving eel recovery and conservation. This is the common goal and the most relevant for all participants. We recommend that this goal should be permanently considered as the driving idea behind the platform.

These general principles include some of the fundamental values for the good governance of the platform. Promoting transparency, inclusiveness, active participation, etc. facilitates more effective and robust participatory processes. Assuming and applying these principles undoubtedly contribute to improving the democratization of many collective processes.

The following is the list of the most common and general governance principles that the platform should aim to implement during its first five years of existence:

- **PARTICIPATION:** it is related to the need to incorporate the diversity of voices of the stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in eel recovery and conservation. Active participation is required, i.e., physical on-site or virtual action is not sufficient. Spoken or written intervention is much more recommendable and when that does not happen, it should be encouraged by means of coordination. One of the participation goals is also to legitimise the result of a deliberation, but above all, as far as possible, the diversity of views and interests of those stakeholders should be taken into account.
- **INCLUSIVITY:** linked to the right of all the stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in eel management to be part of the platform. Opinions should not be excluded or downplayed on the basis of age, gender, nationality or profession.
- **TRANSPARENCY:** related to access by all members of the platform to the most relevant information on eel management. In this regard, information should be disseminated smoothly between all participants and in all directions. The importance of making this information accessible and understandable to all recipients should also be noted. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that the texts are in simple language that is easily assimilable by everyone, in addition to possible translation into all the mother tongues of the users.
- **CONNECTIVITY:** related to the union and sense of community of the members of a specific sector with an interest in eel recovery and conservation, with respect to their peers in other regions and countries. There should also be a communication connectivity between stakeholders from different professional backgrounds. It is important that the relationships between members are aligned and structured to achieve the same goals.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** related to the responsibility and commitments that all platform members must assume with respect to their role in the platform and their role in contributing to achieving the main goal, eel recovery and conservation. All stakeholders involved, either directly or indirectly, in eel management must assume responsibility for their own activity, along with being willing to be accountable in that regard to the other members of the platform and to society in general.

These principles must be progressively shared and assimilated in the internal workings of the platform. They must be, in short, the guiding values by which the coordination of the platform and its members are regulated.

Participation Mechanisms

Participation mechanisms will need to be incorporated and implemented in the platform to ensure that all or most of the participants contribute and collaborate actively in the tasks of this advisory and consultative body.

These mechanisms must be established in order to ensure the proper functioning of the platform, with all participating stakeholders working together to input their knowledge and perspective in the interests of eel conservation

Spaces must be created for the on-site, virtual or mixed participation of all or most of the stakeholders who are platform members. More formal meetings should be held at least one meeting a year, along with regular communications on any issue of interest related to the platform's goal. The coordinators or any other member of the platform must ensure that all or most of the members participate and with the highest degree of involvement possible. Remember that this participation

must be active and inclusive. Each participant's experience must be considered to enrich the deliberation throughout the process and, if possible, all the sectors represented must be seen to be equally important within the platform.

The platform members and, above all, the national or international coordinators must actively participate in the internal dynamics of the platform. The National Committee must gather the issues raised by members in the established participation spaces (for example, a space on the website), and give answers, if appropriate, and refer when relevant to international coordination.

Degree of Compliance with Governance Principles

A tool or mechanism for reviewing and assessing the degree of progressive compliance with the governance principles should be established on the platform. Implementing a relatively simple and not too complex tool would provide the platform with important information which, if positive, would strengthen the platform and its legitimacy.

As the platform grows and evolves over time, different strategies can be put in place to check for greater or lesser compliance with the governance principles. These range from simple internal surveys of all or most members to a slightly more complex process, such as defining specific indicators to measure this compliance.

In a context of greater complexity, external audits could also be carried out to periodically evaluate these indicators. However, we consider that this is not relevant in the early years of the platform. There is a need to understand how the platform is evolving and how relevant the role of the platform is in the context of eel management at national or international level.

Applying these principles as a basis for the good governance of the platform is essential for it to function successfully. Therefore, and currently given the absence of such mechanisms, it would be appropriate for all or some platform members to consider developing those mechanisms from the second year that the platform is up and running.

Founding Members

The founding members of the Eel Governance Platform, partners and associates of SUDOANG, play a key role in the setting up and consolidation of the early stages of the platform's life. They are the members who have laid the foundations of the platform, in terms of its structure, composition, functions, etc., and are the first to make it operational and functional as a result of the pilot project. They are also the ones who play, in this first stage, a dynamic role, as they identify potential new members to join the platform

In the future, the platform may see its new members join and others leave for different reasons. Initially, after the completion of the SUDOANG project, those stakeholders with an interest in eels and who have not participated in this project would ideally gradually be incorporated. Little by little, the structure and composition of the platform should grow and be consolidated. The Professional Committees must consist of all the representative organisations of each sector and from each country.

3. EXTENSION OF THE PLATFORM (INVOLVING THE OTHER STAKEHOLDERS LINKED TO EEL MANAGEMENT)

Professional Committees

As the platform progresses over time and increases in complexity, the different members of the National Committees of each country should plan to create their respective Professional Committees (NGOs, Sport Fishing, Science, Control Forces, Professional Fishing, etc).

From the first year of the platform's existence onwards, the professional committee should consist of all or most of the current member in addition to new incorporations.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL COMMITTEES

The experience of French case can be useful input for the Spanish and Portuguese national committees and joint collaboration would be desirable

At regional level in France, there are the so-called Migratory Fish Management Committees (COGEPOMI), which are public-private roundtables consisting of a diversity of stakeholders with direct or indirect interests in the management of eels and other migratory species in the most important river basins. Furthermore, the French National Eel Committee has also been set up, which brings together interests in the management of this species and centralising those interests at state level. In both cases, in addition to private stakeholders (users, fishermen, NGOs, etc.), various public

administrations are also represented, in particular the French Ministry of the Environment, which leads and directs these organisations.

Therefore, the presence in France of a governance structure focused on the management of eels (among other migratory species) is an interesting experience that can enrich the development of the Governance Platform being created in the current SUDOANG project. Specifically, the governance model applied to eel management in France provides an opportunity to apply and/or adapt its lessons learned to SUDOANG. Therefore, it would also be desirable for the decision-makers of the French Eel Committee to see SUDOANG as an opportunity to share, work together and standardise eel management beyond the national territory. Obviously, addressing the problem of habitat degradation and eel decline is not possible from a local perspective. It is imperative that all countries work together when solving such a complex and supra-local problem. Fostering that collaboration opens up the possibility of developing more efficient management and achieving the goal sooner.

In the SUDOANG project, the Portuguese and Spanish national eel committees have been set up, along with the French team. One of the functions of the French team is to establish contact with the COGEPOMI and the French Eel Committee, to share the goals of the SUDOANG project with them and, progressively, to assess the possibility of the French Committee participating in the governance platform being set up in the project. This participation will enable the three countries to collaborate through the International Coordination created in SUDOANG to lead to European eels being therefore more efficiently managed.

5. EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR MODEL

Smooth communication: International Coordinator – National Committees

The International Coordinator, as the Governance Platform body that brings together the sectoral representatives of the three countries to share information and collaborate in order to obtain support for the transnational management of this species, should establish and maintain smooth communication with their respective national committees. This is essential to bring the interests of the members of each country to this forum where eel issues are jointly addressed.

The creation of the International Coordinator fills a necessary gap in management at European level

The International Coordinator, within the Governance Platform, and within the framework of SUDOANG, is one of the most relevant deliverables of this project. Current management of this species, with a lack of joint coordination, by each of the countries, is perhaps the most important challenge to be met in the immediate future in order to improve management of this species and, therefore, increase its population and reach levels of sustainability

Lowering language barriers

It is important to lower language barrier for smooth communication between platform members from different backgrounds. These barriers can pose a problem of intercommunication between stakeholders from different countries and make it difficult to exchange proposals and to align common proposals and interests to be developed.

This circumstance has to be considered in the initial phases to construct the platform and during the first months of its operation. Furthermore, it must be taken into account, above all, within the framework of the International Coordinator, which is really where these interactions of members from different countries occurs.

This may not be a problem among the stakeholders in the world of science, but it may be a problem among the other participants.

Some possible solutions are for certain members of the platform to volunteer to generously help with translating documents and in face-to-face meetings. Machine translators can also be used, which can be found online and which can help with the interpretation of texts, which is often enough for non-complex communication. In most cases, free machine translators provide an acceptable interpretation of the texts, thus facilitating communication interaction between the parties.

6. LEGAL FORM OF THE PLATFORM

The governance platform is not starting out with an explicit legal form, but can aspire to it if the platform members so wish.

In addition to discussing the pros and cons of this decision internally, and taking a position according to the platform's interests, the respective regulations in each of the countries represented in the platform, as well as the related Community rules, should be studied beforehand.

In some cases, the formalisation of the platform with a specific legal status may lead to some benefits or facilities for its recognition by different administrations and open up the possibility of access to funding, submitting projects to competitive tenders in public calls. On the other hand, the repercussions of this formalisation may need to be taken into account, in terms of the need to comply with certain internal management obligations or the change that this may imply in terms of the philosophy and internal functioning of the platform.

In any case, , it is very difficult at the moment, in the middle of the process of setting up the platform, to make a specific recommendation. Only when the platform gains more experience and complexity will the members who are active at that time be able to assess, better than anyone else, whether or not it is appropriate to give the platform legal status.

7. PLATFORM SUSTAINABILITY

Governance and trust networks

The Governance Platform, in short, is the set of stakeholders from different countries, professional fields and interests, who have understood that only through collaboration can they address a common and complex problem, i.e. the shortage, at critical levels, of the European eel. Faced with this problem, setting up a platform is a strategy that allows them to share information and collaborate beyond the local and national level, with the main aim of recovering and improving the European eel population to optimum levels of sustainability.

All, or most, of the platform participants tend, over time, to generate a network of mutual trust, fostering collaboration (formal or informal, digital, face-to-face, mixed, etc.) to achieve this goal.

These networks must function in a cooperative manner, with stakeholders linked to the public administration and/or to specific interests organizing themselves into mixed public-private networks to address the common problem.

These networks do not replace the public administration, but the latter needs a new, differential approach to address a complex problem that goes beyond a national territory.

The development of these networks can generate tensions between stakeholders, regarding principles and values such as equality, representativeness, legitimacy, etc. but they are necessary, since the assimilation of these values is crucial for the legitimacy of the proposals. The implementation of these principles of good governance contributes to a more democratic functioning with more effective results.

Three-year Strategic Plan

The governance platform should define and develop two- or three-year strategic plans, where agreement is reached on the goals to be achieved during that period, and evaluate the degree of compliance with those goals upon completion.

We think that setting the goals at three years is more realistic, given the complexity of the challenges to be faced, for example, the difficulties involved in adjusting the position and differential interests of most of the stakeholders involved.

Financial sources

The Governance Platform needs to assess whether or not the operation and implementation of the Platform requires external financial sources and discuss whether the platform can be boosted after the SUDOANG project has been completed.

The basic costs, derived from maintaining a minimum structure and management of the platform, have to be discussed. It may be possible to study, if so decided, financing options using public funds from different administrations, in particular the EU, available for the purposes of the platform. Since representatives of different public institutions are founding members, they may be able to study and inform the other members of this issue and reach the decision by consensus among all of them.