

Smuggling of glass eels valued at EUR 10 million: 17 arrests

[ES](#)

8 March 2017

□Greek and Spanish law enforcement bodies and judicial authorities, supported by Eurojust and Europol, have dismantled an international criminal network suspected of having smuggled in the current season over 10 tonnes of eels from the European Union to China, with a profit estimated at EUR 10 million.

A coordinated operation carried out in Greece and Spain led to 17 arrests. In addition, approximately two tonnes of eels worth EUR 2 million were seized, along with data storage devices, documents, luxury cars and approximately EUR 1 million in cash.

The operation was initiated, with Europol support, by investigators from Spain's Guardia Civil's Environmental Protection Service, SEPRONA. They discovered that a company based in Spain had been purchasing eels from several Member States. Once the fish were introduced into the legal market, the company was alleged to have delivered them to Greece using false documentation to finally export them illegally to Asia as 'fresh fish'.

The operation was referred to the prosecutor specialised in environmental crimes and international cooperation at the PPO in Tarragona, the file being finally allocated to Investigative Court number 3 in Tortosa. Information was sent to Eurojust and assistance was requested. The Spanish National Desk at Eurojust, with the support of the Environmental Prosecutorial Unit at the General Prosecutor's Office, coordinated the response at judicial level with delegations from other concerned countries, leading to the organisation of a coordination meeting at Eurojust at the end of January. In Greece, the proceedings were led by the specialised prosecution office for financial crime of Athens.

A coordination centre was set up at Eurojust at the beginning of February, with the involvement of the Spanish and Greek National Desks, to provide support to the action day in Spain and Greece.

Assistance by the national contact points of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) was also sought in view of reintroducing the eels into their natural habitat to the extent possible.

Background

See the [EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking](#). Eurojust supports cooperation and coordination among the Member States in cases of cross-border wildlife trafficking, also in cooperation with other involved EU agencies.

European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) stock is severely depleted. According to estimates from the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES),

until 2011, the recruitment level of glass eels (the number of baby eels produced each year) was only 1 per cent of the level before the 1980s. Despite a statistically significant increase in glass eel recruitment since 2011, the abundance of eels at all stages of their lifecycle remains very low.

According to [EU legislation](#), EU countries need to take measures that allow 40% of adult eels to escape from inland waters to the sea, where they can spawn. The European eel is also listed on Annex II of CITES. Based on the annual recommendations of the Scientific Review Group comprising experts from Member States, international trade in European eels into and out of the European Union is prohibited.

EUROJUST

Corporate Communications Office

The Hague, Netherlands

E-mail: media@eurojust.europa.eu

For all Eurojust press releases, please see www.eurojust.europa.eu (Press Centre).

About Eurojust:

Eurojust supports national authorities in the efficient coordination of investigations and prosecutions of serious and organised cross-border crime.

Photo © European Union, 2016