

Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Ref: Lough Neagh silver eel escapement and target compliance 2024.

The Eel Management Plan (EMP) for the Neagh/ Bann River Basin District sets a silver eel escapement target within the range of 160 to 240 tonnes per year following the requirements of the EU Regulation 1100/2007. Section 13.1.2 of this EMP states that:

“should mark recapture estimation in future indicate that escapement is falling below the target of 200t per year, measured on a rolling average basis, this will necessarily trigger measures to reduce exploitation of yellow or silver eels”.

As part of our assigned work programme AFBI undertake mark recapture surveys of migrating silver eel in the Neagh/Bann catchment for the purpose of estimating harvested and escaping proportions of the silver eel run. The results from this work programme for the years 2003 to 2024 are shown within Table 1 and Figure 1. As is shown in Table 1 the estimated escapement of silver eels from the Neagh/Bann catchment in 2024 was 47.5 tonnes. Please note that the figures for 2024 shown in Table 1 take into account the 3 tonnes of small male eels that the LNFCS reported they caught then returned to the system.

As is outlined within section 13.1.2 of the EMP for the Neagh/Bann River Basin District, silver eel escapement is measured on the basis of a three-year rolling average to account for the variability of silver eel fishing conditions year-on-year.

Recent three-year rolling escapement estimates are:

- **143 tonnes estimated in 2022** (average annual escapement from 2020 to 2022),
- **144 tonnes estimated in 2023 (2021-2023) and**
- **124 tonnes estimated in 2024 (2022-2024).**

As outlined in section 16 of the UK CITES Non Detrimental Finding (NDF), silver eel escapement compliance is measured on the basis of a five-year rolling average. This section states that:

“Should the NDF situation deteriorate, for example, were silver eel escapement from Lough

Neagh to decline below the EMP long term objective (40% of pristine based on a 5-year rolling mean) for a period of 3 or more consecutive years, or stocking of Lough Neagh at sufficient levels cannot be provided from fisheries exploiting a demonstrable surplus of recruitment, international trade will be suspended until such time as conditions exceed the criteria again”.

Recent five-year rolling escapement estimates are:

- **208 tonnes estimated in 2022** (average annual escapement from 2018 to 2022)
- **158 tonnes estimated in 2023** (2019-2023) and
- **122 tonnes estimated in 2024** (2020-2024)

The EMP for the Neagh/ Bann River Basin District sets a stocking target within the range of 6 to 8 million individuals per year. Section 10.5.3 of this EMP states that:

“The LNFCS stocking target is 6 to 8 million individuals or 150 to 200 elver per hectare (which produces a density of eel that ultimately provides a size of eel that reaches a prime market price). This target is consistent with gaining maximum benefit per elver and on the basis of the input-output analysis will supply a managed fishery and allow adequate escapement.”

Attainment of this target is also a component of the UK CITES NDF as outlined above. Stocking by the LNFCS over the period 1984 to 2024 is shown in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2 the stocking target for the Neagh/Bann catchment has been achieved on five occasions between the years 1984 to 2024.

Yours Sincerely,

██████████

Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch
Freshwater Fisheries Section

  [afbini.](#)

Table 1: Silver eel tagging data for the years 2003 to 2024

Year	No. tagged	Toome	Kilrea	Carry over (T+1, T+2y)	Total	Rate (%)	Total annual silver catch (t)	Max. escapement estimate (t)	200t target	
2003	189	33	7	7	47	24.9	114	343	Y	
2004	838	302	15	4	321	38.3	99	159.4	N	
2005	792	118	0	7	125	15.8	117	200	Y	
2006	700	197	1	2	199	28.4	104	262	Y	
2007	0	no tagging due to sporadic nature of silver eel run.						76		
2008	950	193	18		211	22.2	76	266.2	Y	
2009	486	187	0	1	188	38.8	85	134.1	N	
2010	491	167	14	0	181	36.9	97	165.9	N	
2011	474	82	64	3	149	31.4	73	159.5	N	
2012	452	65	19	2	86	19	74	315.9	Y	
2013	451	74	19	3	96	21.2	72	267.6	Y	
2014	956	139	57	3	196	20.5	66	253.2	Y	
2015	898	164	110	0	274	30.5	48.8	111.1	N	
2016	776	151	42	0	193	24.9	52.5	158.3	N	
2017	979	109	2	1	112	11.4	59.7	247	Y	
2018	1007	165	85	2	250	24.8	94	388	Y	
2019	1013	90	93	3	186	18.1	45.6	225	Y	
2020	646	194	5	11	210	32.5	65.6	134	N	
2021	896	259	79	3	338	37.7	64	106	N	
2022	661	128	2	4	130	19.7	46	189	N	
2023	603	232	0	0	232	38.5	44	136	N	
2024	811	231	0	3	231	28	17.3	47.5	N	

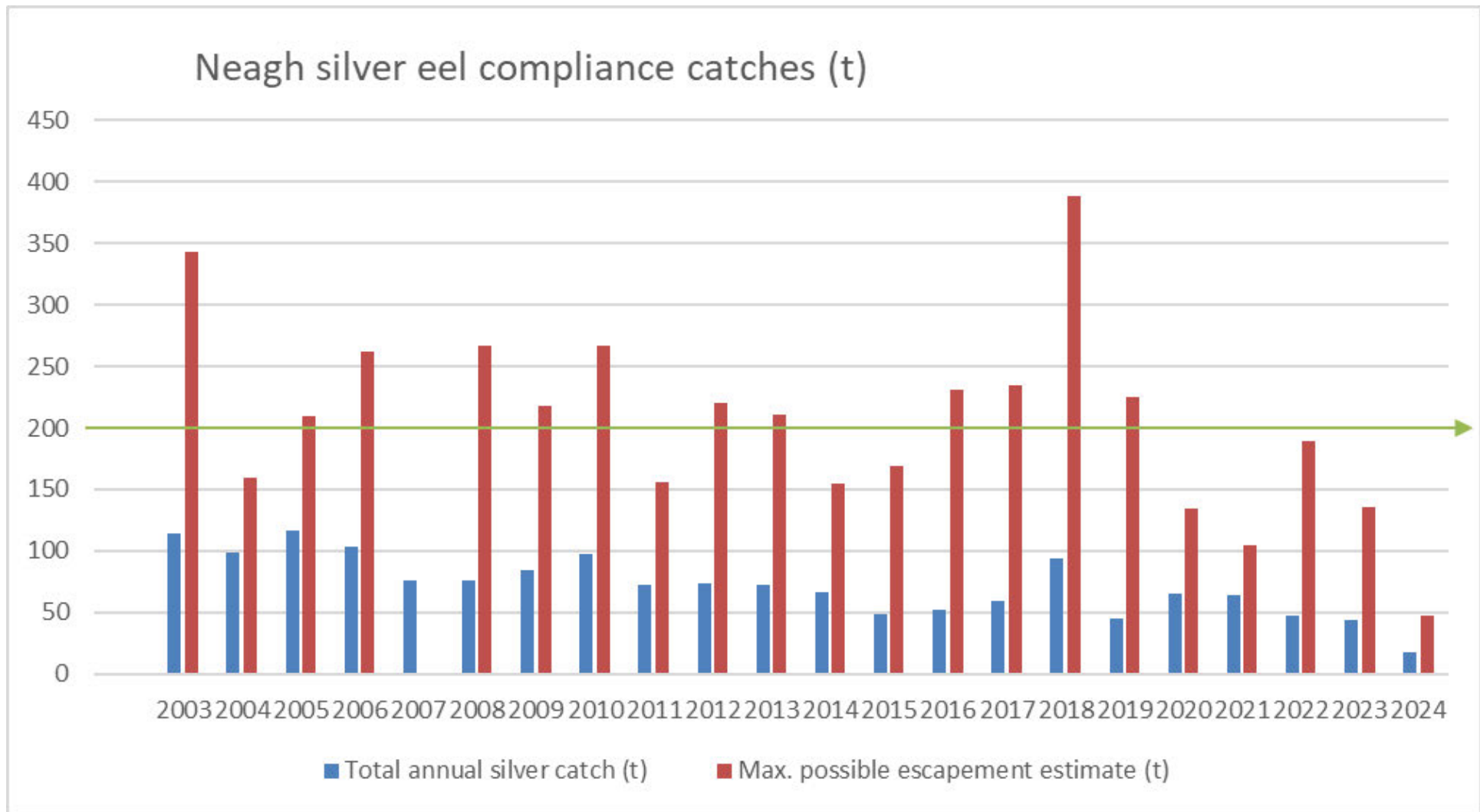


Figure 1: Graph showing Lough Neagh total annual silver eel catches (blue bars) alongside estimated escapement (red bars). The green arrow indicates the 200 tonne EMP conservation escapement target.

The stocking history of Lough Neagh from 1984-2024 (inputs in Millions of individuals based on long term mean of 3000 units kg-1, with EMP stocking target of 6-8 million indicated in blue)

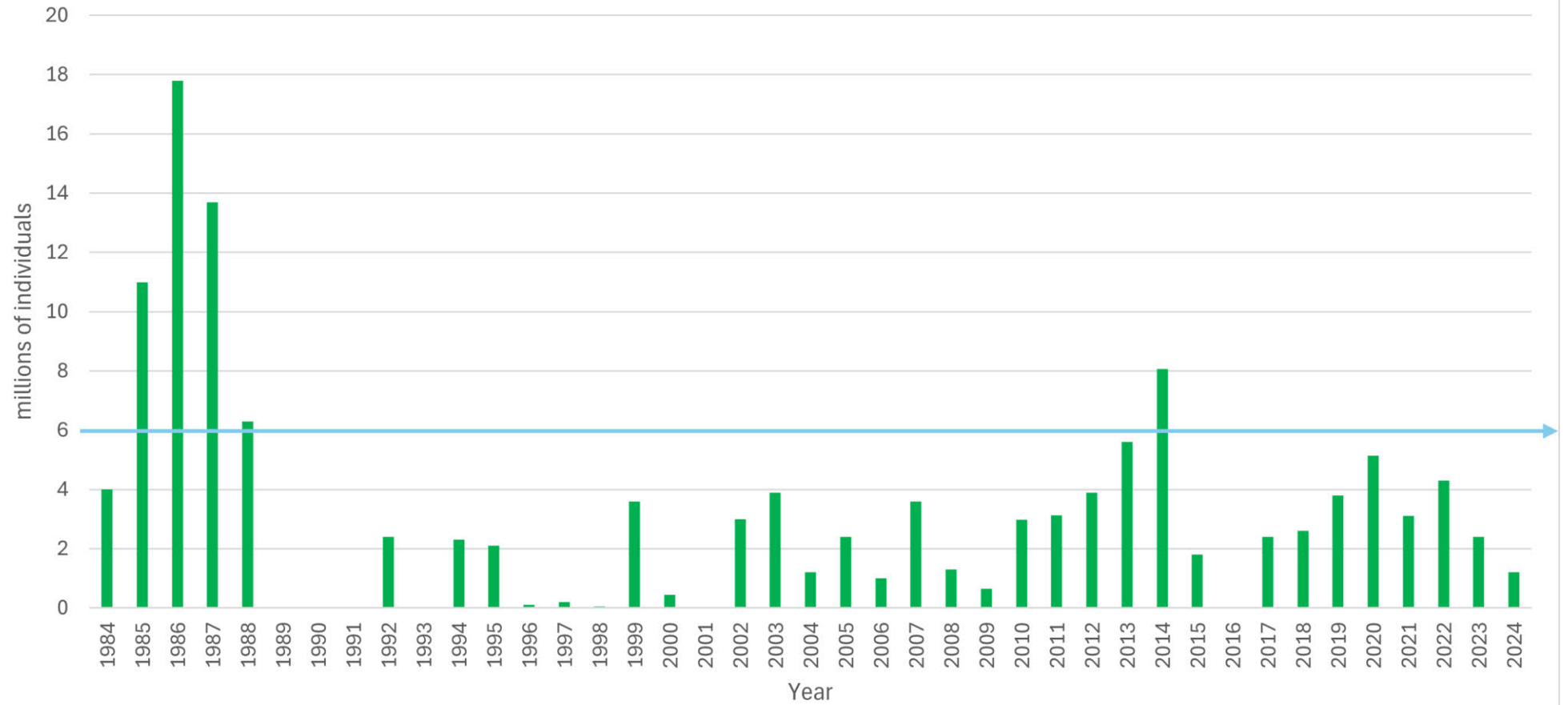


Figure 2: Graph showing Lough Neagh stocking history for the years 1984 to 2024. The blue arrow indicates the lower range of the 6 to 8 tonne EMP stocking target