

Sturgeon policy in the Danube River Basin

Results and interpretation of an
information survey



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Method

The survey at hand was conducted on behalf of the Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF).

- This survey and analysis of sturgeon policy was conducted by the means of a questionnaire sent to representatives of key institutions and administration in the different Danube River countries. This included e.g. sturgeon experts, ichthyologists and fishery ecologists, experts and activists from NGOs as well as officials from the respective public administrations, all bearing the necessary expertise to answer the questionnaire.
- 51 single emails were sent out to contacts in ten countries of the Danube River catchment.
- The questions were centered around the topics of the Action Plan for Danube River sturgeons (SAP) and its impact, national and international sturgeon policy, national action plans as well as national logistics and resources reserved for sturgeon conservation and the role of sturgeon species in the EU Water Framework Directive and similar assessment procedures. One question was aimed at other fish species in the Danube catchment, beside the sturgeons, in the need for special conservation measures.

Results

- Feedback: 25 answering emails and 24 filled out questionnaires from the following countries were received: Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. 35 of the 51 addressed contacts worked on 23 questionnaires as some work-groups/ institutes sent in their results of joint work on the questionnaire.

Action Plan for Danube River Sturgeons (SAP)

- The SAP is well known but not everybody has worked with it or owns a copy of it. The SAP seems to have had only a singular and non recurring effect as it spawned some measures in 2006 mainly on the Lower Danube like e.g. the catch moratorium and the programme for artificial propagation in Romania and the ban of catching hooks in Bulgaria.
- Conclusion: Make the SAP available, which was done already on the DSTF webpage and find a way to constantly bring up sturgeon issues on the respective agendas, which will be one of the future tasks of the DSTF.

National Sturgeon Policy

- Controversial answers here. Political activities are seen as highly effective by "political" people. "Field people" like researchers see the respective policies as only partially or not effective. Major point of criticism here is a lack in the enforcement of laws and regulations and the implementation of conservation measures.
- Conclusions: Political success does not necessarily translate down to the level of implementation of conservation measures directly. Political decisions have to be implemented which takes time. Political process and progress takes place in a different time-frame than applied conservation work.
- There is a lack of communication between the political and the implementation level.
- Law enforcement has to be strengthened.

International Sturgeon Policy

- International agreements exist on the Lower Danube. Yet, they are not enforced as not legally binding. International agreements in D are aimed the Baltic and North Seas only.
- Conclusion: International agreements have to be legally binding.

National Action Plans

- National plans for sturgeons exist in BG, SRB, and H. These were developed independently from the SAP but are in line with it. Proposed measures in these plans are perceived as only partially or not implemented. There is a Romanian management plan that never was implemented.
- There are action plans for and a focus on the Baltic and North Sea sturgeon species in D but no federal activities directed at the Danube River (except political participation in the ICPDR). There is a conservation programme for the Sterlet in Bavaria (state level).
- There are no reserved funds and logistics for sturgeon conservation in the DR basin. Sturgeon expertise of all facets (e.g. in situ, ex situ, field, lab, genetics...) is scarce and scattered along the river with the exception of RO where a working group is located at the DDNI in Tulcea. This also applies to expertise in fishery science and aquatic ecology to a certain extent.
- Conclusion: Action plans need to be enforced. Get federal interest for the Danube situation in D. Establish competence centers for sturgeon, fisheries and aquatic ecology. Expertise for sturgeons, fishery sciences and aquatic ecology is a scarce resource just like funding. This has to be taken into account for the planning and the implementation of conservation measures.

Sturgeons and the EU-WFD

- Sturgeons play a role in the DRB-Management Plan of the ICPDR and are also seen as indicators for the status of longitudinal continuity in the mainstem river system. Yet, generally they are not included in the evaluation systems for the assessment of ecological quality by the means of fishes (e.g. FIBS).
- Conclusion: The presence or absence of sturgeons should be included in WFD evaluation systems to allow for an ecological assessment on a larger scale. Evaluation is biased just looking on a short-term and local basis.

Other Fish species relevant for conservation

- Answers can be grouped into:
- 1) threatened species
- 2) endemic species and species groups
- 3) species and groups with indicator qualities
- 4) combinations of these).
- Conclusion: Develop the "other fishes" part in the strategy and Sturgeon 2020 programme. Start with a Danube River fish inventory including threatened status and indicator value/ practical use of indicators for environmental and conservation work and proposed conservation measures. Link other fish species to the sturgeons.

Conclusions

- When looking at the results of the survey at hand, one has to keep one important fact in mind. The following compilation and analysis is based on two different categories of information, due to the nature of the questionnaire.
- On one hand there are the “facts” and on the other the “opinions”. Opinions reflect how a certain topic or situation is perceived. They are strongly influenced by the character and position, the centre of activities and the specific features of the working environment of the respective individual. Whereas “facts” would allow for a quantitative analysis, opinions don’t.
- Nevertheless, both information categories allow to draw a picture of the actual situation and how it is perceived.