1000 YEARS OF EUROPEAN COMMERCIAL EEL FISHERIES

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Lifecycle of the European eel (Lat. Anguilla anguilla)

Marked in green: the habitat of Anguilla anguilla, the European eel.
Commercial eel (\textit{Anguilla anguilla}) fisheries and international trade in Europe c. 1100-1850

- **Origin of fish:**
  - Denmark: ●
  - Italy: ●
  - The Netherlands: ●
  - Other or unknown: ●

- **Events:**
  - Salted eel from Denmark to England
  - Salted eel from Narva to Stralsund
  - Salted eel from Lübeck to Narva
  - Salted eel from Amsterdam to Königsberg
  - Smoked eel from Riga to Pärnu
  - Transcontinental trade from Copenhagen to Surinam

- **Timeline Events:**
  - 1000
  - 1075
  - 1150
  - 1225
  - 1300
  - 1375
  - 1450
  - 1525
  - 1600
  - 1675
  - 1750
  - 1825

- **Fisheries:**
  - Commacchio eel fisheries
  - Dutch eel fisheries
  - Limfjord eel fisheries
Commachio (South of Venice)
Eel market in Amsterdam, Dam sq.

Visitor to the eel market in 1808 stated:

“…in comparison to fishwives in other countries (their garments) prove that they enjoy a certain wealth. The earrings and gold necklace, as well as the purse strapped to a silver semi-circle, the snuffbox and the silver shoe buckles which these women often wear, are indisputable evidence (of this)” (Heuvel, 2012).
“That’s right, uncle, talk to your heart, like the housewife who yelled at the eels she was putting in her pie. She hit 'em on the head with a stick and shouted, “Down, you naughty things, down!” That was the woman whose brother wanted to be nice to his horse, and buttered its hay.”
- Shakespeare, King Lear.

London custom accounts:

- Fresh eel from c. mid-1400s - ‘anguillis recentibus’
- 1502/03: >20 eel vessels docking
- 1600s: ~50 metric tons annually from Zuiderzee
- Napoleonic Wars: counterband commodity paid in gold
- Last shipment to London: 1939.
Eel shipments dead and alive through the Danish straits before 1634 (n: >100 shipments)

source: (www.soundtoll.nl)

“Aall leffuendis kiøfft paa Amage,”

Jan Carnilson shipping from south of Copenhagen to Zaandam north of Amsterdam. November 1618
"Eelcake" – one of 42 Danish recipees with eel

Danish seine invented in 1848
Deep sea investigations -> breeding place of Atlantic eel, 1903-1922

C.G.Joh.Petersen:
"The eel does not spawn in our waters, safe to catch as many as possible" (1905)

"The eel does not belong in one country, better left to the Great Powers to decide" (1907)

(a) fishing  
(b) hydropower, pumping stations, and other water intakes  
(c) habitat loss or degradation  
(d) pollution, diseases, and parasites  
(e) other management actions that may affect levels of predation, e.g. conservation vs. control of predators.  
(f) Climate change may have effects, but these have not been quantified.
Complex challenge: Some fishing is legal, so is consumption

Fjorden er smækfyldt af ulovlige åleruser

Politiet har været med til at samle de ulovlige ruser sammen. Der er bedestart for at udsætte ulovlige ruser. Privatfoto

På to uger har Fiskerikontrollen hevet 93 ulovligt udsatte åleruser op af Ringkøbing Fjord - vicefiskeriinspektør har aldrig sett magen.
Conclusion – lessons from oceans past:

• Commercial eel fisheries since at least 1100s

• Eel subject to probably first international trade in live fish

• Source of technological innovation

• Long-term perspective matters to understand longevity of culture and dietary preferences
THANK YOU!