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AMERICAN EEL: A SYMPOSIUM INTRODUCTION

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On October 23-25, 2015, the “American Eel Symposium: Future Directions for Science, Law, and Policy” was hosted by the *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal* (OCLJ) and the Center for Oceans & Coastal Law at the University of Maine School of Law, as well as the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI). Organizing partners and financial sponsors were the Sargasso Sea Commission, the Marine & Environmental Law Institute (MELAW) at Dalhousie University, the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The hosts and organizers wish to acknowledge and thank Faith Bulger of the Sargasso Sea Commission for managing the Symposium’s organizational challenges.

The American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) and the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) are catadromous species which live most of their lives in fresh and brackish water habitats. *Anguilla rostrata* is found in the waters and rivers of the Eastern seaboard of North America, the big islands of the Caribbean, and some of the mainland states of South America. The mature fish migrate thousands of miles to the Sargasso Sea, south of Bermuda, where they spawn and die. Although the spawning has never been witnessed, it is known that the young *leptocephali* find their way back to the fresh waters of the Americas to begin the cycle again. Both *Anguilla rostrata* and *Anguilla anguilla* are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red list (*Anguilla anguilla* is “Critically Endangered” and is on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species - CITES). There is significant concern about the status of both species, due to a decline in recruitment, population, and escapement of the species over the past four decades. In 2014 the Government of Monaco – supported by the Sargasso Sea Commission – had the European eel listed under Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) as “having a conservation status which would significantly benefit from international co-operation”

The objective of the Symposium was to generate informed discussion among the scientific, legal, commercial, and policy communities in the United States and Canada concerning the conservation status of the American eel and the management practices of its range states; with comparative perspectives provided by European eel experts. Presenters and panelists provided knowledge on the science and the legal and conservation status of the species in both the United States and Canada. The Symposium aimed to compare the situation facing conservation of the American eel with that of the European eel and review whether there are any relevant lessons to be learned from the experience in Europe. The panels considered the latest data on migration patterns, best estimates of size of stocks, potential threats and the associated management, as well as use of the species by commercial interests and indigenous communities. Key knowledge gaps relating to science, management, and conservation were identified along with national and international policies and legal instruments to sustain the species.

Following the Symposium Opening Session, the first substantive session provided an overview of American eel scientific research. Session Two covered the socio-economic and cultural significance of the American eel. Session Three panelists provided an overview of threats to eels. Session Four considered lessons from European eel research and conservation. Session Five elaborated law and policy frameworks for the conservation and sustainability of American

eels from both the United States and Canada. Session Six concluded with a Keynote Address that provided a global perspective on the conservation of migratory species, delivered by the Executive Secretary of the CMS, followed by a robust discussion of projections and pathways.

The Symposium transcript follows. Please note that the speakers and panelists had the opportunity to review and edit the following transcripts. New language appears in brackets, and ellipses indicate omissions of language. The organizers wish to express their appreciation to all who made the Symposium a success, in particular, the student volunteers.