

## EEL-Y GOOD PROTECTION

Work recently began on rivers in the North East to help give added protection to endangered eels.

We are installing special screens at its water intakes on the rivers Tees, Tyne, Wear and Coquet to prevent eels from being injured or killed by the water intake pumps.

European Eels have been in decline all over Europe and North Africa over the past 30 years with the number of elvers (young eels) migrating into European rivers falling to less than 5% of 1980s levels. This decline has put the eel on the critically endangered list and made it the subject of legislation to help reverse the decline in the number of adult eels returning to the sea.

Special screens at six river intakes across the region will be installed to prevent eels becoming drawn into the points where freshwater is taken from the rivers to supply reservoirs and water treatment works.

Our experienced partner, Mott MacDonald Bentley (MMB), started work on the first eel protection project at Lumley pumping station on the River Wear in Chester le Street. The £11 million project to install protection at the six intakes across the water company's area will be completed by March 2020 to comply with the Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009.

The Eels Regulations were introduced to protect eels as European eel stocks are at an all-time low and continue to decline. The recovery plan aims to return the eel stocks to sustainable levels.

Michael J Walsh, our Project Manager, said: "Following the implementation of the Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009, a refurbishment scheme was proposed to install new screens at the pumping station/water intakes. The upgrades will help protect eels and fish that may be drawn towards the pumps at the intake.

"We are committed to doing this in a way that protects the environment, which is so important to us all. Since the 1980s, Eel populations have seen a sharp decline. It's not known exactly why there's been such a dramatic decline, but this project will help ensure the safe passage of eels in our region and, ultimately I hope, will contribute to restoring populations."

We are working closely with the Environment Agency to ensure this scheme achieves the objectives of maintaining water supply whilst achieving compliance with the Eels Regulations and that any environmental, economic or social impact associated with the work is kept to an absolute minimum.

Environment Agency Fisheries Technical Officer, Robbie Stevenson, added: “We are really pleased to see all of the hard work by all involved begin to come to fruition. Over the past few years, the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water and expert suppliers and contractors have been working closely to agree on the best possible outcome at each of the sites.

“The European eel is critically endangered throughout their range from Africa to northern Europe. These fascinating creatures have a complex life cycle, beginning life in the Sargasso sea and undergoing several changes during their life maturing in European waters, before returning to the Sargasso to spawn.

“This current work will go a long way to minimise the potential impact that each of these sites have not only on eel but on other fish, and the wider biodiversity of the rivers in which they live.”

Further updates on the progress of the works can be found on the Northumbrian Water community portal: <https://nwcommunityportal.co.uk/Projects/>