

The Future of the Katew (American Eel)

Katew, or American Eel as they are known in the English language, have a unique life and a special bond with the Aboriginal Peoples of Eastern Canada. They have now also caught the attention of western scientists who think that Katew may soon disappear from Mother Earth. Unfortunately, the conclusions of these scientists are based mostly on western scientific knowledge less than fifty years old. In the administrative, legal deadline driven rush to process scientific reports, social and economic impact analyses, regulatory impact statements, and management plans, the Government of Canada may soon list and manage the Katew under the Species At Risk Act (SARA) without understanding all the consequences of the Government's actions or even the situation of Katew.

American Eel have, and still do, serve as a food source for our People; being baked, stewed, or smoked and preserved. The dried skin of Katew (*kadaagel*) is useful in creating binding materials for artwork, clothing, tools, and sleds and to create bandages and braces to relieve injury stress on bones or muscles. Certain parts of Katew are also very important in ceremonies such as *Pagetunowwedomkawa'* and *Apuknajit*.

Fishing for Katew by Aboriginal Peoples in the Maritimes dates back 4,000 years ago as evidenced, not only through our stories, but also from petroglyphs and several stone weirs located throughout the Maritimes. There exists within our communities a wealth of knowledge about the distribution, life history, habitat, population size and trends, and biology of Katew and the current threats to the survival of Katew.

This past fall, American Eels were assessed by the Committee On the Status of Endangered Species In Canada (COSEWIC) as being a Species of Special Concern. COSEWIC believes that if Katew is not specially managed, with threats mitigated, the population may decline further and it could become Threatened with extinction. Although the COSEWIC report was very well written with numerous scientific paper references, the report incorporated very little Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) - just briefly commenting on the historical use and fishing methods of Maritimes Aboriginal Peoples.

The COSEWIC recommendation to list Katew as a species of Special Concern has been forwarded to the Minister of Environment for consideration to be listed under SARA. Even though the COSEWIC status report is incomplete, Aboriginal Peoples have the chance to comment on the proposed listing of Katew under SARA through the Fisheries and Oceans Canada Social and Economic Impacts Analysis consultation process.

Another concern is the speed at which a SARA Management Plan is being developed. SARA requires a Management Plan to be developed, with consultation with Aboriginal Peoples and stakeholders, within three years of legal listing under SARA. However, a SARA Management Plan has already been drafted by the Canadian Eel Working Group (Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) - before Katew has been listed.

Additionally, this SARA Management Plan was drafted with no input from Aboriginal Peoples and little input from stakeholders in the Maritimes Region. Currently, this draft SARA Management Plan is being circulated for consultations - at the same time as the SARA listing consultation process for American Eel.

We are not opposed to the special management of Katew and the introduction of protective measures for Katew and its habitat; however, there now exists the distinct possibility that, in the administrative push to list and manage Katew under SARA, vital ATK and information on the social and economic impacts to Aboriginal Peoples of listing Katew under SARA will be missed by the Government. The Government may soon make a decision on the future of Katew, based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

It is in both Aboriginal Peoples' and the Government's best interests to fill these knowledge gaps. We also need to continue to push Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and the provinces for a meaningful, open, and predictable process for the involvement of Aboriginal Peoples in the earliest stages of SARA.

The Maritime Aboriginal Peoples Council and its partner Native Councils: NCPEI, the Native Council of Nova Scotia, and the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council have requested a consultation session with Fisheries and Oceans to discuss the proposed listing of Katew, the deficiencies in the COSEWIC assessment, and the deficiencies in the process to develop a SARA Management Plan for the Katew.