

Adult eels, when fully mature at age 4-10 years, complete the round trip by descending to the sea and making their way back to the spawning grounds.

This migration takes five months during which time they travel an average 30km per day. Spawning takes place in springtime at a depth of around 1000 metres. At the end of the five-month spawning period, the eggs are released and float up (regulated by a fat globule inside each egg) to a depth of 400-500 metres. If conditions are right, the larvae emerge and begin the cycle anew.

When captured, baby eels are still white and must be placed in tanks of warm water so that their backs will turn black. This operation results in a mortality rate of 25-30%.

Live eels are then separated and placed in trays. Meanwhile a cloth containing tobacco has been soaking in ordinary tubs of water (about one black-tobacco or European brand cigarette per 10-20kg of baby eels). Pouring this nicotine-laced solution over baby eels kills them instantly.

Eels must then be washed with clean water to remove gelatinous material and separate individual specimens from the ball-like mass they form in contact with the nicotine solution.

Next, the eels are placed in boiling water to which salt has been added, and removed before the water returns to a boil (similar to the method used in cooking shrimp). Water may be reused up to three times, after which more salt (100g/10L H₂O) must be added permitting reuse for six more batches. Eels are then removed, allowed to dry and, once packaged, placed in cold storage or freezer. Eels are sold in 250g, 500g and 1kg (net weight) vacuum-sealed packages labelled in accordance with the appropriate standards.

Eels are priced at around Pts 8000/kg during most of the year, climbing to Pts 12000-14000/kg in the Christmas season. Frozen eels average Pts 1000-1500/kg less than the fresh product.