

EEL

Italian fisheries statistics indicate an annual catch of 1,600-1,800 tonnes of European eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) from inland waters and the Mediterranean. In addition to this, some 3,000 t per year are produced in aquaculture operations. Imports have been rather steady in recent years at around 2,400-2,800 t, of which the great part is imported in the fresh-chilled state. Exports run around 1,000 t, mainly of canned and smoked product. The eel catch is relatively steady throughout the year, but, as with imports, there is a notable peak in sales in the October-December period, prior to the main consumption season at Christmas time. There is little fresh eel consumption, and practically all local production and imports are processed by smokers and canners. With regard to size, the canners normally prefer larger sizes (80 cm and up), whereas the smokers prefer the smaller eels.

Main sources of supply are the Mediterranean countries such as France, Greece, Turkey and Tunisia, but also come from the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, the USA and as far away as New Zealand.

Due to the strong preference for the live product, Canadian exporters have in the past encountered technical difficulties in arranging direct non-stop air shipment to Italy, and this remains a key factor in ensuring limited mortality en route, particularly in the summer period.

It is important to note that Italian health regulations require that frozen fish products be gutted. Also, besides the usual Fisheries Health Certificate, eels must be accompanied by a Mercury Certificate stating that the mercury content does not exceed 0.7 ppm.

Although the EC has a duty for eels, a duty-free quota is established each year for fresh or frozen imports destined for the canning and smoking industries.