

# Operation Lake VI

**Thomas Wahl**

## News

On 24 June 2022, European law enforcement authorities reported on the results of the [sixth edition of “Operation Lake”](#), which was carried out between November 2021 and June 2022. This annual operation targets the smuggling of the protected European glass eel. Europol, OLAF, the European Fisheries Control Agency and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) coordinated law enforcement activities in 24 countries across the EU and beyond. The operation led to over 27,700 inspections, the arrest of 49 individuals and the seizure of 1,255 kilograms of glass eels worth about €1.9 million in total.

Since the first edition of the operation in 2016, more than 500 individuals have been arrested and 18 tonnes of glass eels have been prevented from being smuggled and returned to their natural habitats (→ [euclid 2/2021, 81-82](#)).

Operation Lake VI brought to light several patterns of this type of environmental crime, such as:

- Smuggling of glass eels in passenger suitcases after the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, whereby organised crime groups often rely on human mules and use sophisticated methods to keep glass eels alive in the baggage;
- Traffic routes go from Europe to Asia (especially China), where glass eels are considered a delicacy;
- EU nationals are mainly responsible for the illegal fishing while nationals from the destination countries in Asia arrange logistics and transportation;
- Once arrived in Asia, the eels are grown in fish farms and then distributed to different markets around the globe.

The analyses of the operations showed that European law enforcement is increasingly involved in combating cross-border wildlife crime. It also demonstrated that trafficking of these fish is one of the most lucrative crimes for organised criminal networks. It is estimated that illegal profits amount to €3 billion per year.

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