



FACT SHEET

SOUTHERN MULLET

Chelon richardsonii

Family: Mugilidae

Other common names: South African mullet, Harder

Description

An elongate fish with a pointed snout. The body has an overall silvery colour but is darker above and lighter below. There is a yellow blotch on the gill covers.

Distribution

Southern African endemic found from Kubito in central Angola to Port Edward on the east coast of South Africa.

Habitat

Nearshore marine environment, surf-zone, estuaries and lower freshwater reaches of river systems. Although juveniles and adults are common in Eastern and Western Cape estuaries, this species is usually more abundant in the nearshore marine environment.

Feeding

They feed on detritus, benthic diatoms, benthic invertebrates, zooplankton, epiphytes and surf-zone phytoplankton.

Movement

They remain in the surf-zone and nearshore marine environment for most of the year but form large shoals in autumn and spring prior to nomadic movement, often in response to food availability.

Reproduction

They reach maturity at 20 cm total length and an age of 2 years. Spawning occurs in spring and summer in the nearshore marine environment in the Western Cape. Spawning can be delayed to coincide with high rainfall periods and the breaching of estuaries which allows adults to escape and spawn at sea.

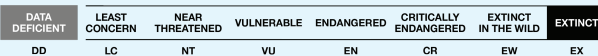
Age and growth

They can reach a maximum size of 45 cm total length and a weight of 1.1 kg. They have been aged up to a maximum of 11 years.

Current status

Along the west coast the southern mullet stock has displayed symptoms of overfishing, with a reduction in catch per unit effort and mean size between 1998 and 2017. The stock is currently considered to be heavily overexploited and strict management measures are required to rebuild the stock. They have not been evaluated on the IUCN Red List.

South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Orange.



Capture

Southern mullet is the main target species of the inshore commercial net fishery (gillnet and beach-seine) on the west coast of South Africa. They are often salted and dried and sold as “bokkoms”. There is also a substantial illegal fishery for this species, especially in the Berg Estuary. They are also caught by recreational, commercial, artisanal and subsistence fishers mainly by castnet but also by line and bottletrap and mostly used as bait.

Current recreational fishing regulations

Daily bag limit: 50 per person per day

Minimum size limit: None

Closed Season: None

Other regulations: Cast-nets and beach-seine nets may only be used from sunrise to sunset. There are restrictions on mesh sizes, net lengths, depth and rope lengths in the commercial beach-seine and gillnet fisheries. Both these fisheries are also governed by a Total Allowable Effort (TAE) and area restrictions.

Marine protected areas (MPAs): Most inshore MPAs on the south and west coasts which prohibit fishing are likely to provide protection for southern mullet. Overall, southern mullet in unfished areas are significantly larger than those in fished areas. Closure of the Berg Estuary to gillnetting led to recovery of the population/stock in that estuary and the adjacent sea.

Reference

Information from the ORI Fish App. www.saambr.org.za



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