

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

GASCOYNE COAST REGION



Department of
Fisheries

PUBLISHED
JUNE 2009

Fish for the future

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Gascoyne Coast Bioregion extends from the Zuytdorp Cliffs, north of Kalbarri, to the Ashburton River, south of Onslow, and contains around 100 species of fish that are targeted and caught by recreational fishers.

This guide provides a brief overview of some of the region's most popular and sought-after fish species. Fishing rules are contained in a separate guide on fishing in the Gascoyne Coast Region.

The marine environment

The Gascoyne's marine environment is characterised by a mix of tropical and temperate conditions, which is reflected in the fish species found in the area.

To the north, near Exmouth, tropical species such as emperor species and mackerel dominate. Farther south, temperate species such as western rock lobster, tailor, pink snapper, mulloway and western sand whiting occur.

A major influence on marine ecology, and the distribution of species and their spawning success, is the Leeuwin Current. This warm, tropical current flows south from Indonesia and down Western Australia's coast past Cape Leeuwin and into the Great Australian Bight.

While the current varies greatly from year-to-year, it strengthens in March to April, carrying free-floating larvae, and many tropical species down the west coast.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S FISHERIES BIOREGIONS



Ningaloo and Shark Bay

An array of aquatic life and natural wonders has made the Shark Bay World Heritage Area and the Ningaloo Marine Park world famous, attracting thousands of tourists and fishers each year.

One of the most popular species in Shark Bay for fishers is pink snapper. There are three separate stocks of pink snapper in the inner gulfs of Shark Bay, plus a separate oceanic population. These stocks do not interbreed and are vulnerable to overfishing. Accordingly, there are special fishing rules to help preserve pink snapper stocks in and around Shark Bay.

The protected waters of Shark Bay sustain extensive seagrass beds which are key nursery areas for finfish and invertebrate species, such as prawns and scallops. The warmer waters around the Ningaloo Marine Park supports a diversity of marine life associated with its coral reef systems.

The Ningaloo reef, at 260 kilometres long, is Australia's largest fringing coral reef system. In general, the Ningaloo Marine Park is essentially closed to commercial fishing and provides a high quality recreational fishing experience for species such as spangled emperor, Spanish mackerel and coral trout. The North West Cape protects the inner waters of Exmouth Gulf, a key commercial fishery for prawns.

Exmouth Gulf also supports an extensive mangrove system, which provides anglers with the opportunity to target popular creek species such as mangrove jack and mud crabs.



Photo: WA Tourism Commission

OFFSHORE – BOTTOM DWELLING

Baldchin groper

Choerodon rubescens

Habitat: Coral reefs and rock area.

Grows to: About 90cm and 7kg.

Reproduction: Matures as female at about three to four years and 27cm.

Changes sex to male at about 10 to 12 years

and 48 to 55cm. **Features:** Abruptly pale white chin, blunt snout with short head and eyes set well above mouth.



Blackspotted tuskfish

Choerodon schoenleinii

Habitat: Over seagrass beds and reefs.

Grows to: About 80cm and 10kg.

Reproduction: Matures as female at about 25cm and three years and then dominant female changes sex to male at about 56cm and 10 years.

Life Span: At least 16 years.

Features: Black spot at base of dorsal fin.



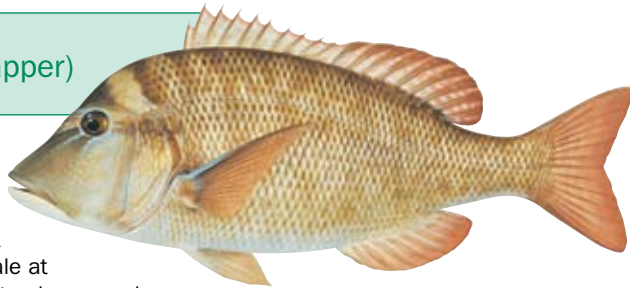
Bluelined emperor (grass emperor, black snapper)

Lethrinus laticaudus

Habitat: Juveniles are commonly found over inshore seagrass beds. Larger fish migrate to coastal reefs.

Grows to: About 80cm and 6kg.

Reproduction: Matures as female at about 32cm then changes sex to male at about 38 to 44cm. **Features:** Dark streaks on each scale and short blue lines connecting the eyes.



Blue-spotted emperor

Lethrinus sp.

Habitat: Coral reefs and lagoons, hard sandy sea-bed away from reefs.

Grows to: About 60cm and 3kg.

Features: Blue cheek spots, brown streak from the eye to the jaw.



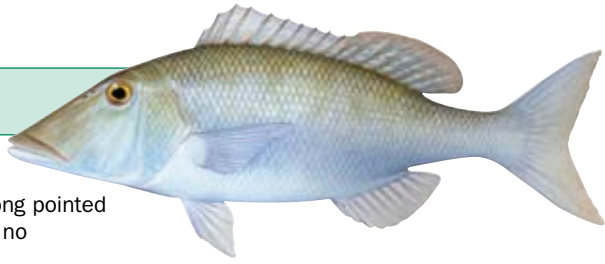
Long-nose emperor

Lethrinus olivaceus

Habitat: Coral and rocky inshore reefs.

Grows to: About 100cm and 10kg.

Features: Relatively slender body and long pointed snout. Dull greenish or olive colour with no distinctive markings.



Spangled emperor (Nor'west snapper)

Lethrinus nebulosus

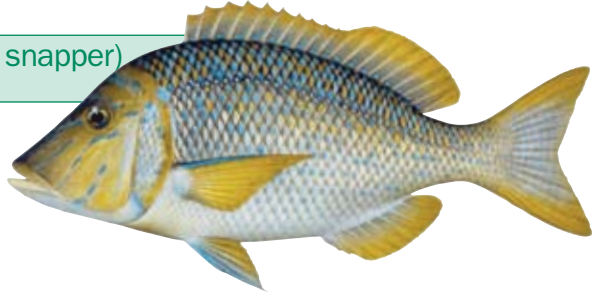
Habitat: Coastal reefs over sand.

Grows to: About 80cm and 8kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 40 to 45cm and four to five years old.

Life span: At least 27 years.

Features: Blue bars on cheek.



Sweetlip emperor (redthroat emperor)

Lethrinus miniatus

Habitat: Coral/rocky reefs, forages widely over sand at night. **Grows to:** About 90cm and 9kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 40cm and six to seven years old. Changes sex from female to male.

Life span: At least 22 years.

Features: Red fins, mouth and red around eyes.



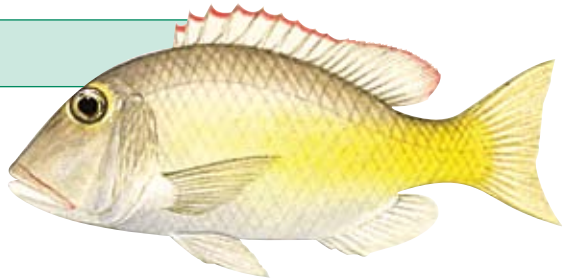
Yellowtail emperor

Lethrinus atkinsoni

Habitat: Coral reefs, lagoons, seagrass.

Grows to: About 45cm and 2kg.

Features: Reddish fins and yellow-orange tail with red margins. Yellow around eye and red at corner of mouth.



Chinamanfish

Symphorus nematophorus

Habitat: Inshore coral reefs and deeper offshore areas to at least 50m.

Grows to: About 100cm and 18kg.

Life span: At least 30 years.

Features: Juveniles have elongated filaments on rear part of dorsal fin.



Bar cheek coral trout

Plectropomus maculatus

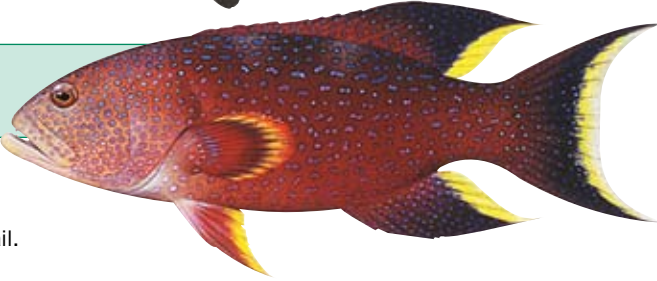
Habitat: Inshore coastal reefs.
Grows to: About 100cm and 25kg.
Reproduction: Matures at about 54cm and two years old. Changes sex from female to male. **Life span:** At least 12 years.



Coronation trout (yellowedge)

Variola louti

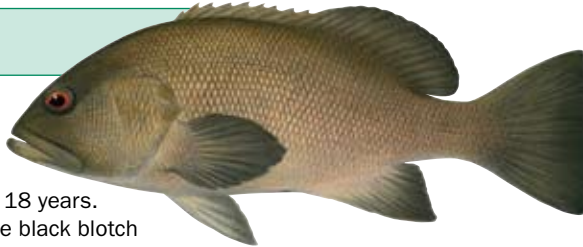
Habitat: Inshore coral reefs and deeper offshore reefs to 100m.
Grows to: About 83cm and 12kg.
Features: Distinct lunar-shaped tail.



Breaksea cod

Epinephelides armatus

Habitat: Coastal reefs. **Grows to:** About 60cm and 3kg. **Reproduction:** Males mature at about 25cm and three years. Females mature at about 30cm and at least five years. **Life span:** Around 18 years.
Features: Varies in colour, but a distinctive black blotch surrounds the anus – hence its local name 'black arse'.



Estuary cod (goldspotted rockcod)

Epinephelus coioides

Habitat: Juveniles found in estuaries and among mangroves. Mature adults migrate to near shore and offshore reefs. **Grows to:** About 120cm and 30kg. **Reproduction:** Matures as female at about 57cm and three to four years old. Changes sex to male at about 55 to 75cm and five years old. **Life span:** At least 22 years.



Rankin cod

Epinephelus multinotatus

Habitat: Juveniles are found in inshore coral reefs. Adults migrate to deeper offshore reefs and trawling grounds when mature. **Grows to:** About 100cm and 9kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 41cm. Changes sex from female to male. **Life span:** At least 22 years.

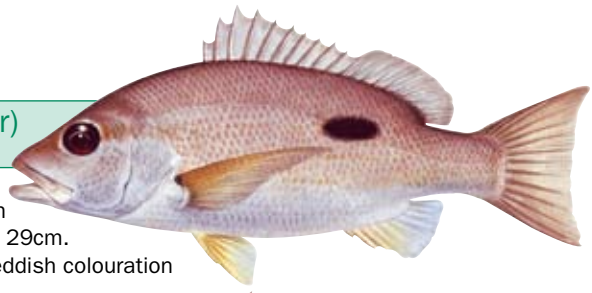


Moses perch (moses snapper)

Lutjanus russelli

Habitat: Estuaries, bays, and coastal and offshore reefs. **Grows to:** About 50cm and 2kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 29cm.

Life span: At least 21 years. **Features:** Reddish colouration and back spot (sometimes faint) on back.



Saddletail snapper (saddle-tailed seaperch)

Lutjanus malabaricus

Habitat: Coastal and offshore reefs and trawling grounds.

Grows to: About 100cm and 8kg.

Life span: At least 32 years. **Features:** Has a larger head and mouth than crimson snapper.



Robinson's seabream

Gymnocranius grandoculus

Habitat: Deep offshore reefs and trawl grounds. **Grows to:** About 80cm and 5kg. **Features:** Wavy blue lines on cheek and snout.



Stripey seaperch (stripey snapper, Spanish flag)

Lutjanus carponotatus

Habitat: Forms schools near inshore coral reefs and on soft bottoms to 80m.

Grows to: About 50cm and 2kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 24cm.

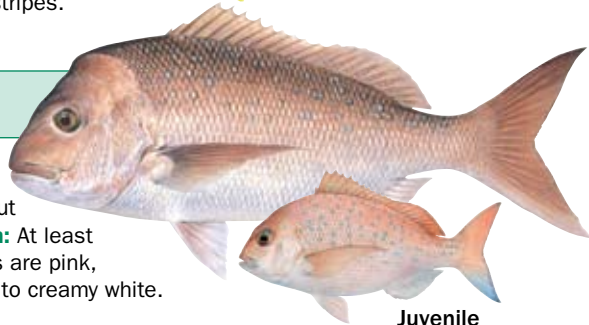
Life span: At least 20 years. **Features:** Sides of body are yellow or blue-grey with orange or yellow stripes.



Pink snapper

Pagrus auratus

Habitat: Reefs, large bays or on the Continental Shelf. **Grows to:** Over 100cm and 10kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 40cm and four to five years old. **Life span:** At least 30 years. **Features:** Top, tail and side fins are pink, and the bottom fins range from pale pink to creamy white. Bright blue spots on upper part of body.



Juvenile

Red emperor

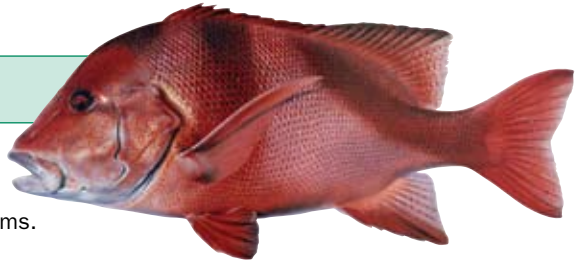
Lutjanus sebae

Habitat: Juveniles inhabit nearshore turbid waters to offshore reefs. Mature adults migrate to deeper offshore coral reefs and adjacent sand and rubble bottoms.

Grows to: About 116cm and 33kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 50cm and three to four years.

Life span: At least 34 years.



Western rock lobster

Panulirus cygnus

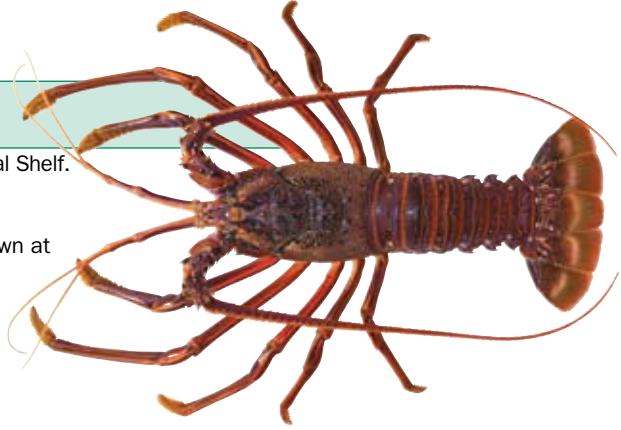
Habitat: Inshore reefs to the Continental Shelf.

Grows to: At least 17.5cm.

Life span: At least 28 years.

Reproduction: Females generally spawn at about six to seven years.

Features: Shorter, less dense spines on upper carapace than the southern rock lobster.



OFFSHORE – PELAGIC

Broad-barred Spanish mackerel (grey mackerel)

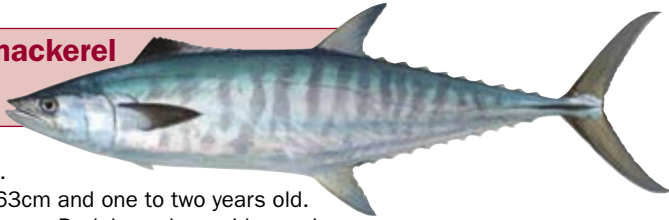
Scomberomorus semifasciatus

Habitat: Coastal seas near reefs.

Grows to: About 125cm and 10kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 63cm and one to two years old.

Life span: At least 12 years. **Features:** Dark bars down sides and black area at front of dorsal fin.



Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel

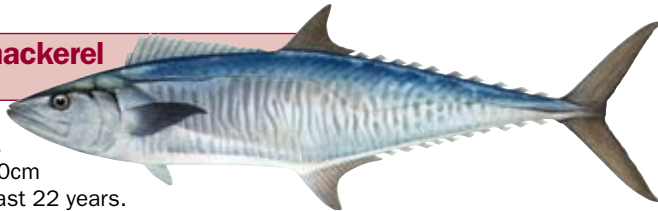
Scomberomorus commerson

Habitat: Offshore and coastal reefs.

Grows to: About 240cm and 40kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 80cm and two years old. **Life span:** At least 22 years.

Features: Banded pattern, elongated shape, fewer dorsal spines than its broad-barred relative.



Queensland school mackerel

Scomberomorus queenslandicus

Habitat: Inshore coastal waters.

Grows to: About 130cm and 12kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 53 to 54cm and one to two years old. **Features:** Large dark spots on sides and black area at front of dorsal fin.



Wahoo

Acanthocybium solandri

Habitat: Oceanic waters, well offshore. **Grows to:** About 250cm and 83kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about one to two years old.

Life span: At least six years. **Features:** Elongated shape, numerous spines in first dorsal fin.



Cobia

Rachycentron canadus

Habitat: Coastal waters. **Grows to:** 200cm and 68kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at 50 to 60cm and two to three years old. **Life span:** At least 15 years.

Features: White stripe on side.



Mahi-mahi (dolphin fish)

Coryphaena hippurus

Habitat: Warm oceanic waters, often schooling around floating objects. **Grows to:** About 210cm and 40kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 40 to 50cm and four to five months old.

Life span: Short lived, up to four years. **Features:** Yellow sides with black spots, elongated body and humped head.



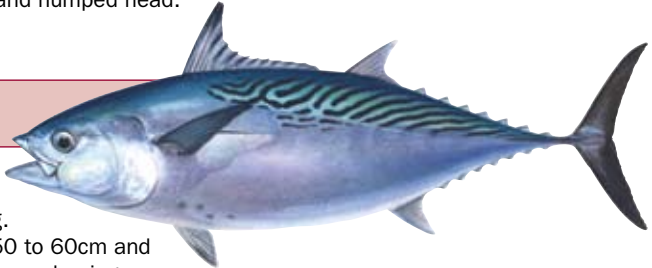
Mackerel tuna

Euthynnus affinis

Habitat: Open waters close to the shoreline.

Grows to: About 100cm and 14kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 50 to 60cm and three years old. **Features:** Dark blue colouring on shoulder and broken stripes on lower back.



Northern bluefin tuna (longtail tuna)

Thunnus tonggol

Habitat: Inshore and ocean waters.

Grows to: About 150cm and 36kg.

Features: Short pectoral fins and slender body shape.



Yellowfin tuna

Thunnus albacares

Habitat: Oceanic waters

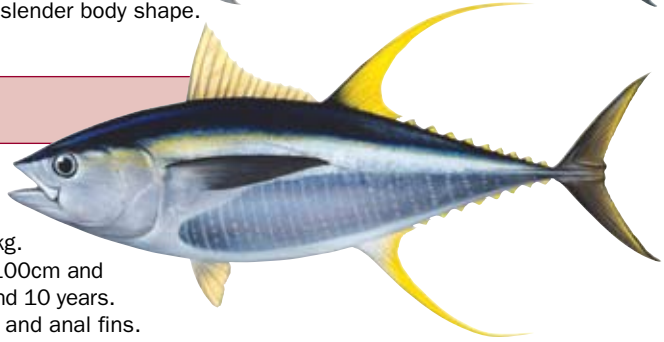
generally well offshore.

Seasonally in temperate waters.

Grows to: About 210cm and 176kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 100cm and two to three years. **Life span:** Around 10 years.

Features: Elongated yellow dorsal and anal fins.



INSHORE

Blue swimmer crab

Portunus pelagicus

Habitat: Bays, estuaries, muddy or sandy bottoms, intertidal areas to 60m deep.

Grows to: About 20cm carapace, 80cm claw span and 1kg.

Reproduction: Matures at 8 to 9cm carapace.

Life span: Up to three to four years.

Features: Mottled blue in males and mottled brown in females, broad carapace, long claws.



Green mud crab

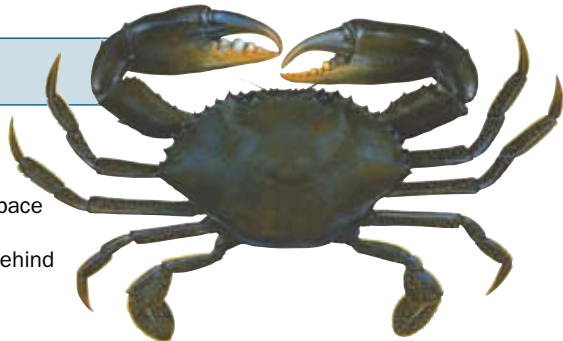
Scylla serrata

Habitat: Muddy bottoms among mangroves, in sheltered estuaries and tidal flats.

Grows to: About 30cm carapace and 2.5kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 13cm carapace length. **Life span:** Up to four to five years.

Features: A pair of double spines situated behind each claw and another pair on each wrist.



Chinaman cod (Charlie Court cod)

Epinephelus rivulatus

Habitat: Inshore coral and rock reefs, small coral heads or among weed.

Grows to: About 35cm and 1kg.

Reproduction: Changes sex from female to male.

Features: Oblique brown/reddish bars on sides, white blotches on head, large mouth.



Common dart

Trachinotus botla

Habitat: Sheltered bays and estuaries to surf beaches. **Grows to:** About 75cm and 3.5kg.

Features: Small embedded scales, short pectoral fins, deep angular body.



Giant trevally

Caranx ignobilis

Habitat: Coastal waters and offshore waters near reefs.

Grows to: About 170cm and 80kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 95 to 96cm and five years old.

Features: Steep forehead, silvery dusky colour.



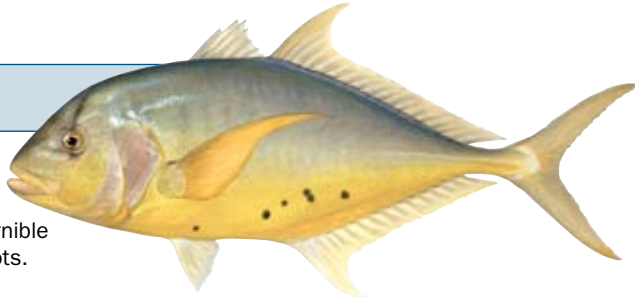
Golden trevally

Gnathanodon speciosus

Habitat: Coastal waters and offshore waters near reefs.

Grows to: About 120cm and 15kg.

Features: Large fleshy lips, no discernible teeth and golden belly with black spots.



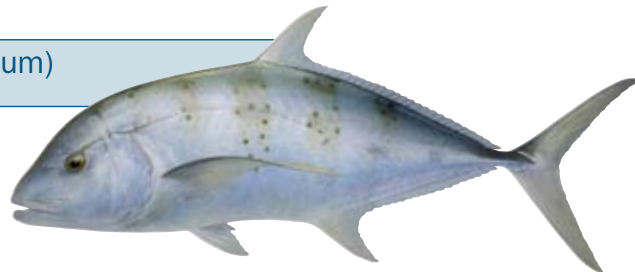
Gold-spotted trevally (turrum)

Carangoides fulvoguttatus

Habitat: Coastal waters.

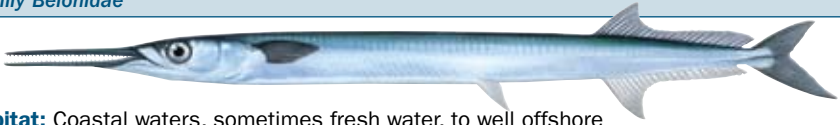
Grows to: About 130cm and 12kg.

Features: Elongate shape with gold/brassy spots on side and back.



Longtom

Family *Belontiidae*



Habitat: Coastal waters, sometimes fresh water, to well offshore in the open sea. **Grows to:** About 150cm and 6.5kg.

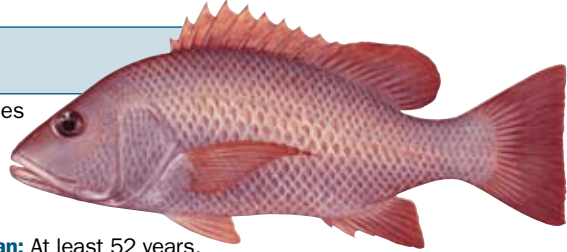
Features: Long slender body, jaws extended into a bill, sharp teeth.

Mangrove jack

Lutjanus argentimaculatus

Habitat: Juveniles inhabit mangrove estuaries and tidal rivers. Mature adults migrate to sheltered inshore coral reefs and offshore trawling grounds. **Grows to:** About 150cm and 12kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 54 to 55cm and five to six years old. **Life span:** At least 52 years.

Features: Tall dorsal fin, no stripes on side, no black on fins.



Mulloway

Argyrosomus japonicus

Habitat: Coastal embayments and estuaries, off beaches and inshore reefs.

Grows to: About 200cm and 74kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 90cm and six years old.

Life span: Around 30 years. **Features:** Silver/bronze sides, long dorsal fin and 'spade tail'.



Northern mulloway

Protonibea diacanthus

Habitat: Found in tidal rivers, estuaries and coastal waters over muddy bottom.

Grows to: About 150cm and 20kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 75cm and three years old.

Features: Large scales, needle-like teeth and silvery-bronze in colour.



North-West blowfish (silver toadfish)

Lagocephalus scleratus

Habitat: Coastal waters.

Grows to: About 88cm and 6.5kg.

Features: Distinct silver stripe on side, pronounced incisor teeth.

Can give a serious bite. Flesh is poisonous.

POISONOUS



Queenfish

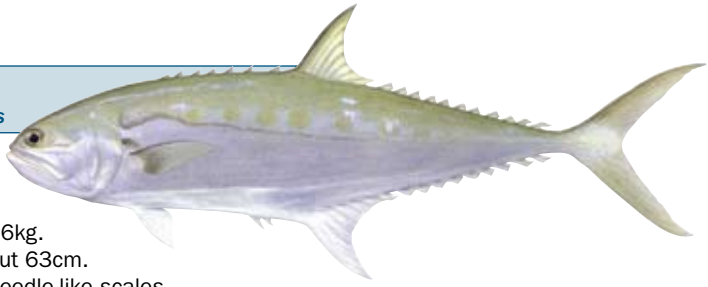
Scomberoides commersonianus

Habitat: Tropical waters over the Continental Shelf, often in very shallow water.

Grows to: About 120cm and 16kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 63cm.

Features: Leathery skin with needle-like scales, sides have dark blotches.



Oriental bonito

Sarda orientalis

Habitat: Coastal seas.

Grows to: About 100cm and 10kg.

Features: Distinguished by narrow horizontal stripes on upper part of body.



Sea mullet

Mugil cephalus

Habitat: Abundant in estuaries and coastal bays. Mature fish migrate to open sea to spawn.

Grows to: About 80cm and 4kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 30cm and three to four years. **Life span:** Around 16 years.

Features: Large gelatinous eyelid and bluish spot on pectoral fin base.



Tailor

Pomatomus saltatrix

Habitat: Beaches, inshore reefs, estuaries.

Grows to: About 120cm and 14kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 35cm and two to three years old. **Life span:** Around nine years.

Features: Prominent lower jaw, silver, elongated and compressed body.



Tarwhine (silver bream)

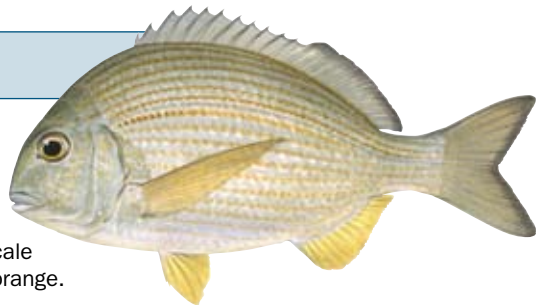
Rhabdosargus sarba

Habitat: Coastal marine, estuaries and offshore reefs to 35m deep.

Grows to: About 50cm and 2.5kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 17cm to 21cm and two to three years.

Features: Silvery with yellow lines matching scale rows, anal and pelvic fins vary from yellow to orange.

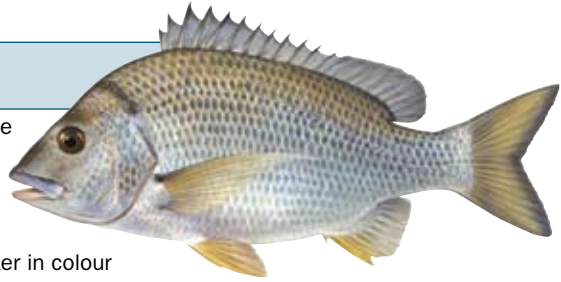


Yellowfin bream

Acanthopagrus latus

Habitat: Coastal reefs, estuaries and inshore reefs to 35m. **Grows to:** About 50cm and 1.5kg. **Reproduction:** Matures as male at about 24cm and two to three years old, then changes sex to female.

Life span: At least 24 years. **Features:** Lighter in colour than Northwest Bream and has yellow fins.



Western school whiting

Sillago vittata

Habitat: Inshore marine.

Grows to: About 30cm and 0.2kg.

Reproduction: Matures at about 13 to 16cm.

Features: Distinctive dark blotch at base of pectoral fin.



Yellowfin whiting

Sillago schomburgkii

Habitat: Shallow sandy areas near estuary mouths and inshore waters.

Grows to: About 42cm and 0.7kg. **Reproduction:** Matures at about 18 to 20cm and two years.

Life span: Up to around 12 years.

Features: Yellow pelvic and anal fins, sides plain and silvery, pointed snout.



Before you leave, tell someone about your boating plans, and if these change during the voyage, notify them immediately. Always report in when you return.

The information in this guide is current at the time of the date of printing, but may change. For the most up-to-date information on fisheries and fishing rules in plain English, check the Department of Fisheries' website at www.fish.wa.gov.au or contact the Department before going fishing.

The latest version of each brochure is available for download in PDF format from the website. For legislation, a link from the website will take you to the State Law Publisher.

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WA'S JOURNAL OF FISHING AND THE AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT



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