

Eyebrow Wedgefish, *Rhynchobatus palpebratus*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Near Threatened	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Near Threatened
Global Assessors	Kyne, P.M. & Rigby, C.L.		
Australian Assessors	Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T., Simpfendorfer, C.A. (Shark Action Plan) & Rigby, C.L.		
Report Card Remarks	Severe global population reductions, common in Australia where fishing pressure low and managed, though suspected population decline prior to management. Listed on CITES Appendix II.		

Summary

The Eyebrow Wedgefish is a large demersal continental shelf ray in the tropical and subtropical waters of northern Australia, southern New Guinea, Thailand, and Taiwan, although its range is poorly defined outside of Australia. It is caught incidentally by trawl and net fisheries and except in Australia, retained for its meat and highly valued fins. In Australia, it is common and *Rhynchobatus* species are caught in a range of fisheries, including the Northern



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Prawn Fishery and Queensland East Coast Trawl Fishery where they are considered at low risk of being unsustainably fished. Bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) have been mandated in most of the fisheries since the early-mid 2000s and reduce the catch of *Rhynchobatus spp.* by ~37%. If caught, it would be released as elasmobranch retention is prohibited in most northern fisheries. Many parts of the species' range have relatively low fishing effort and the species would receive refuge in the extensive network of marine parks. Outside of Australia, it is subject to intense and unregulated fisheries and its population is suspected to have significantly declined by >80%. However, most of its known range is in Australia and thus the global status is suspected to be Near Threatened (IUCN). The Australian population has likely undergone some decline prior to management. Therefore, in Australia, it is assessed as Near Threatened (IUCN) (Kyne et al. 2021) and Sustainable (SAFS). The species is listed on CITES Appendix II.

Distribution

The Eyebrow Wedgefish occurs in tropical and subtropical waters of northern Australia, the Arafura Sea, and southern New Guinea (Papua New Guinea and Indonesia), with records also from Thailand and Taiwan suggesting its range outside of Australia is poorly defined (Last et al. 2016, Kyne and Rigby 2019). In Australia, it has a wide range from Gladstone (Queensland) to Exmouth Gulf (Western Australia) (Last et al. 2016, Kyne et al. 2021).

Stock structure and status

There is limited species-specific information on population trends of the Eyebrow Wedgefish, globally or in Australia, in part due to previous taxonomic confusion of the *Rhynchobatus* species. Globally, the population is inferred to have significantly declined in the Asian part of its range (>80% reduction) due to current and ongoing high levels of exploitation and demand for its high-value fins (Kyne and Rigby 2019). In Australia, however, it is common (Kyne et al. 2021) and the fishing pressure is relatively low and managed, though the population has likely undergone some decline.

Fisheries

The Eyebrow Wedgefish is taken incidentally in trawl and net fisheries. In Indonesia, it may be taken and retained for its meat and high-value fins, and in Papua New Guinea, it is commonly caught and considered at high risk from the Gulf of Papua Prawn Fishery where it may also be retained (White et al. 2006, White et al. 2018, Baje et al. 2021). In Australia, species-specific catch levels are difficult to determine due to the taxonomic confusion. *Rhynchobatus* species are caught in the Commonwealth Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF), the Queensland East Coast Trawl Fishery (ECTF) and East Coast Inshore Fishery (Harry et al. 2011, Campbell et al. 2018). It is possibly caught in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Developmental Fishery and Inshore Fishery (Jacobsen et al. 2019a, b), the Northern Territory Demersal Fishery (DF) and Western Australian prawn fisheries and Demersal Gillnet and Longline Fisheries (Braccini et al. 2021). Bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) have been mandated in most of these fisheries since the early-mid 2000s and have reduced the catch of *Rhynchobatus* spp. by 37% (Brewer et al. 2004). If it is caught, it would be released as elasmobranch retention is now prohibited, except in the Queensland GoC Inshore Fishery, although post-release mortality is unknown. *Rhynchobatus* spp. was considered at low risk of overfishing in the ECTF and the NPF due to estimated fishing mortality being below levels leading to population reduction (Zhou and Griffiths 2008, Campbell et al. 2018). Catches in Western Australian fisheries are likely minimal as effort is limited and negligible bycatch has been reported in recent years (Gaughan and Santoro 2021). Across northern Australia, many parts of the species' range have low fishing effort and the species would receive refuge in the extensive network of marine parks (Parks Australia 2023).

Habitat and biology

The Eyebrow Wedgefish is demersal on the continental shelf at depths of 5–60 m (Compagno and Last 2008). Maximum size is at least 262 cm total length (TL) with males mature at 103 cm TL (Compagno and Last 2008, Kyne and Rigby 2019). Little else is known of its biology.

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity: unknown Max size: at least 262 cm TL
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: 103 cm TL Females: unknown

CAAB Code: 37 026004

Link to IUCN Page: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/195475/2382420>

Link to page at Shark References: <https://shark-references.com/species/view/Rhynchobatus-palpebratus>

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