



FACT SHEET FOR CUTLASSFISH

Scientific Name:	<i>Trichiurus lepturus</i>
Common Names:	Cutlassfish, Walla-Walla
Family:	Trichiuridae
Size:	Can grow up to 2 m

Identification Features:

The body of this fish is extremely elongate & strongly compressed, tapering to a thin tubular tip at the end of the tail. The dorsal fin runs from just behind the head of the fish, all along the length of the body. It is translucent. There is no pelvic fin. Their mouths boast an impressive set of very sharp, fang-like teeth with barbed ends. The lateral line on this fish is very conspicuous. Scales are absent on the body. A dissection of this fish reveals a very long & thin swim bladder. This fish more often than not assumes a vertical stance in the water with its head pointing forward and its long body trailing downwards. The purpose of this distinctive behaviour is not known.

Distribution

Cutlassfish are found worldwide in tropical and temperate waters all along continental shelves and shores, also at islands nearby. In South Africa they are found from Mozambique all along our coast to Namibia.

Habitat:

Cutlassfish are benthic-pelagic from shore down to 350 m. they are usually caught over sand or silty bottoms. In KZN they enter the deep water Durban and Richards Bay Harbours throughout the year. They are however more prevalent in the warmer summer months.

Diet:

Feeding takes place at dusk and dawn. Juveniles feed primarily on pelagic crustaceans in mid water by day. By night they form loose aggregations at the surface where they feed on macro zooplankton. Adults feed on small pelagic fish, especially anchovies as well as small squid, prawns and mantis shrimps. As with many other carnivorous fishes the stomach of a Cutlassfish distends greatly during a feed. The body weight can increase by as much as 25%.

Reproduction:

Spawning has been recorded off the KZN coast among specimens exceeding 70cm. Females tend to be larger than the males.

50% maturity:

Males 64 cm and Females 69 cm

Maximum age:

Oldest fish caught so far was 15 years

Reproductive style:

Gonochoristic

Age at sexual maturity:

Unknown

Capture:

This fish is easily caught by anglers and mainly used for bait. It is trawled commercially in many parts of the world - not in South Africa however. Cutlassfish are normally encountered in dense shoals and are very vulnerable to net capture.

SA Angling Record:

2.4 kg

SA Spear fishing Record:

N/A

Worldwide largest recorded weight:

5 kg

Regulations:

Bag limit:

10

Minimum size:

None

Closed Season:

N/A

SASSI:

N/A

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