**SEA MULLET**

**Scientific name:** *Mugil cephalus*

**Key identifying features:** The sea mullet has a transparent fatty eyelid covering most of the eye. Their anal fin has three spines with eight (rarely nine) soft rays in adults. Dorsal fins are widely separated, and there are no dark spots at the base of the pectoral fin. The second dorsal and anal fins only have scales on the anterior and basal parts of the fins.

**Distribution:** Worldwide, found almost entirely between approximately 42°N and 42°S. Within Western Australia sea mullet are found along the entire coastline.

**Maximum length, weight and age:** 787mm, 4.9kg, 16 years

**Length at Maturity:** 373mm

**Spawning season:** February to September (in South-western Australia)

**Spawning location and habitat:** The sea mullet spawns in nearshore marine waters and embayments. Sometimes sexual maturity is approached by individuals in estuaries, but there has been no evidence of them spawning. Sea mullet in cultured environments can mature under range of salinities and then spawn at full strength sea water. Elsewhere in the world, they have been shown to spawn 40-50 miles offshore, in waters of 900 to 1,600 metres in depth. Some studies suggest that tides are a trigger for spawning.

**DEVELOPMENT AND HABITAT USE**

**Eggs:** Pelagic, hatching at approximately 48hrs

**Larvae:** Sink during the first 10 days after hatching and then exhibit positive phototaxis (movement in response to light). Larvae can acclimate to hyper-saline conditions (up to 126ppt) for short periods of time.

**Juveniles:** Live in nearshore, shallow areas of marine embayments and estuarine systems. They typically enter estuaries at 20-30mm length and have a strong preference for low salinities all year round in estuaries, although not necessarily all individuals exhibit this characteristic.

**Adults:** Live in shallow coastal waters, marine embayments, estuarine systems and rivers.

**Migration:** Adults migrate into the upper reaches of estuaries, and mature fish then move downstream in warmer months. Migrations along the coast are typically northward on the west and east coasts of Australia.

**Diet:** Sand, detritus, diatoms, algae and occasionally crustaceans and bivalves. The ingestion of is sand suggested to act as a “grinding paste” for degradation of plant cell walls in the stomach.

**FISHERY**

**Recreational:** Infrequently targeted using nets in estuaries of the West Coast and South Coast Bioregions.

**Commercial:** Caught by set nets, haul nets and beach seines in estuaries, and beach seines in nearshore waters, along the West Coast and South Coast bioregions, including the West Coast Beach Bait Managed Fishery and South
Coast Estuarine Managed Fishery. A complete catch trend graph can be found in the 2010/11 State of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Report. One of the most commercially important species in the Swan River Estuary. This species is also caught in the Gascoyne Coast bioregion, and is one of the key target species in the Shark Bay Beach Seine and Mesh Net Managed Fishery (SBBSMNMF).