



Australian Government



# Native Fish Strategy

## FISH FACTSHEET: SHORT-FINNED EEL (SILVER EEL)



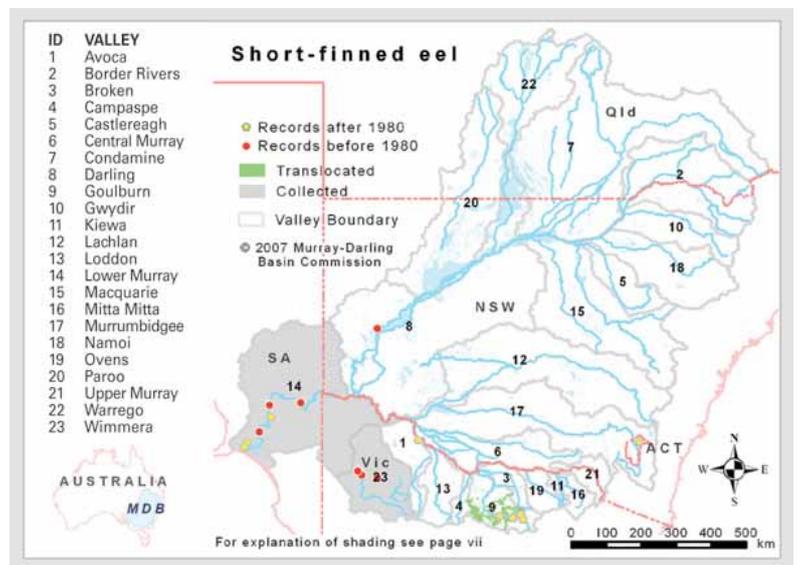
Scientific Name

*Anguilla australis* Richardson , 1841

photo by Gunther Schmida

### DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Primarily a fish of coastal streams outside the Basin, there are occasional records from inland streams. Most inland records are assumed to be of fish translocated from coastal streams by anglers, but some represent natural dispersal events. There are occasional records in the Basin from the upper Murrumbidgee River (possibly translocated via the Snowy Mountains Scheme) and historic and recent records from the lower Murray in SA. The species has also been introduced into the Wimmera River Basin in Vic via water transfer from the Glenelg Basin.



## IDENTIFICATION

A large, elongate and cylindrical eel. Maximum length is 1100mm and maximum weight is 3.2kg, but most individuals are <700mm long and weigh less than 400 g.

The dorsal, anal and caudal fins are joined, with the dorsal fin commencing just in front of, or level with the anal fin. Usually coloured a uniform olive-green to golden-brown dorsally, with a whitish or sometimes silvery-white belly. The mouth is large with distinct and numerous teeth. The mouth is large, but unlike that of the Long-finned eel, does not extend well behind the eye, instead finishing below the eye.

## BIOLOGY AND HABITAT

This species lives in a variety of habitats including rivers, lakes and swamps, generally with low or no flow. It migrates to sea to spawn, with the spawning location being the Coral Sea near New Caledonia . The larval eels are washed down the east Australian coast by sea currents. The larvae then metamorphose and attain the typical eel shape before entering fresh water in spring-summer and migrating upstream to the upper reaches of rivers. Adults occupy a well-defined home range of about 400 m. Females dominate the catch in freshwater environments and males are more abundant in downstream, estuarine areas. Males are sexually mature at 14 years and females at 18-24 years. Adults may remain in fresh waters for 20 years or more before migrating to the sea to breed and then die.

A voracious nocturnal predator, the Short-finned eel eats a variety of fish, crustaceans, molluscs and insects.

## POTENTIAL THREATS

None known in MDB, but in coastal systems barriers to downstream migration of adults, particularly hydroelectricity schemes and associated turbines are cause cause for concern. Overharvesting of larval eels for aquaculture and adult eels are also potential threats.

## GENERAL REFERENCES

- Allen et al. 2002;
- Beumer 1979a, 1996;
- Koehn & O'Connor 1990;
- McKinnon 2002;
- Sloane 1984a,b

## PDF LINKS

Fishes of the Murray-Darling Basin: An introductory Guide;

<http://mdba.gov.au/files/publications/MDBA-Fish-species-book.pdf>

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