Sand Whiting  
(*Sillago ciliata*)

**EXPLOITATION STATUS**  **FULLY FISHED**

Sand whiting are targeted by recreational anglers and commercial fishers throughout their range. Commercial landings and catch rates are stable.

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**Background**

The sand whiting (*Sillago ciliata*) occurs along the entire eastern coastline of Australia, from Cape York (Queensland) to Victoria and eastern Tasmania. It is also found in New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea. In NSW waters, sand whiting are found in estuaries and coastal waters off ocean beaches. Within estuaries, the favoured habitat is bare sandy substrate. Sand whiting eat bottom dwelling invertebrates, particularly polychaete worms, crustaceans and molluscs taken by fossicking though the sand.

Spawning occurs in the lower reaches of estuaries and in coastal waters near river mouths during summer. Larvae then enter estuaries, with the small juveniles preferring shallow water (particularly along sandy shores, but also in and around seagrasses and mangroves). Sand whiting grow reasonably quickly, taking about 2 years to reach 25 cm fork length (FL) after which growth slows. They mature at around 24 cm FL (males) and 26 cm FL (females). Maximum length is about 50 cm (total length). After spawning, adults may either enter estuarine waters or remain along ocean beaches.

The majority of sand whiting are taken in the Estuary General Fishery using hauling and mesh nets. Sand whiting are caught throughout the year but landings peak during the summers. Sand whiting is a very popular species amongst recreational fishers, and the recreational catch is estimated to be 2 to 3 times greater than the commercial catch.
**Additional Notes**

- Significant amounts of biological and monitoring data are now available for sand whiting.
- The size composition of the commercial catch has been relatively stable since the 1960s.
- There is a minimum legal length of 27 cm total length for sand whiting and a combined recreational bag limit of 20 whiting.

**Catch**

*Recreational Catch of Sand Whiting*

The annual recreational harvest of sand whiting in NSW is likely to lie between 230 and 460 t. This estimate is based upon the results of the offsite National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey (Henry and Lyle, 2003) and onsite surveys undertaken by I & I NSW.

*Historical Landings of Sand Whiting*

Commercial landings (including available historical records) of sand whiting for NSW from 1952/53 to 2008/09 for all fishing methods.

*Catch Per Unit Effort Information of Sand Whiting Harvested by Mesh-Netting in NSW*

Catch rates of sand whiting harvested using mesh-netting for NSW. Two indicators are provided: (1) median catch rate (lower solid line); and (2) 90th percentile of the catch rate (upper dashed line). Note that catch rates are not a robust indicator of abundance in many cases. Caution should be applied when interpreting these results.
Length Frequency of Sand Whiting

The length distribution of sand whiting in NSW commercial landings was relatively stable from the 1960s to the 1990s, and comprised mainly fish between 25 and 35 cm fork length (FL). Most of the catches sampled were taken with hauling nets. Commercial landings sampled during recent years included more samples from mesh net catches, and showed an increased proportion of larger (>30 cm FL) whiting. The minimum legal length for sand whiting in NSW is 27 cm total length (approximately 25 cm FL).

Growth Curve of Sand Whiting

Age-length data with fitted growth curve for sand whiting (Ochwada et al. 2008). Lengths are presented as fork length (FL).

Further Reading


Please visit the CSIRO website, [http://www.marine.csiro.au/caab/](http://www.marine.csiro.au/caab/) and search for the species code (CAAB) 37 330010, common name or scientific name to find further information.