

RECOMMENDATION

EPINEPHELUS DAEMELII - BLACK COD

The Fisheries Scientific Committee, established under Part 7A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (the Act), has made a recommendation to list *Epinephelus daemeli*, black cod, as a VULNERABLE SPECIES in Schedule 5 of the Act.

The listing of Vulnerable Species is provided for by Part 7A, Division 2 of the Act.

The Fisheries Scientific Committee has found that:

1. The black cod, *Epinephelus daemeli* (Günther, 1876) of the family Serranidae, subfamily Epinephelinae, was formally described as *Serranus daemeli* Günther, 1876 and was also known in Australia as *Epinephelus forsythi* Whitley, 1937 and by the common names the saddled rockcod and in New Zealand, as the spotted black grouper. Large individuals of this species are difficult to distinguish visually from some other large species of *Epinephelus*.
2. *Epinephelus daemeli* has been recorded from the temperate and subtropical waters of the southwestern Pacific: Australia, Norfolk Island, Kermadec Islands and New Zealand (North Island and Poor Knights Island). The Australian range extends from southern Queensland to Kangaroo Island off South Australia. The species is described and figured in Heemstra, P.C. & J.E. Randall, 1993, *FAO Species Catalogue, Volume 16, Groupers of the World (Family Serranidae, Subfamily Epinephelinae)* and Kuitert, R.H., 1997, *Guide to Sea Fishes of Australia*, where details of its distribution are also given.
3. NSW is the centre of the species distributional range in Australia.
4. *Epinephelus daemeli* is an aggressive territorial species that may occupy a particular cave for life. Sexual transition from female to male occurs at a length of 100 to 110cm with maximum length between 150 and 200cm.
5. *Epinephelus daemeli* has suffered a population decline in NSW, based upon:
 - historical evidence (pre 1908) that a decline in abundance and possibly size occurred around the turn of the century due to fishing pressure especially near large towns or cities; and
 - anecdotal evidence from the 1960's and 1970's documented in various fishing magazines of overfishing by recreational line fishers and spearfishers, as large specimens were considered a prized catch.
6. *Epinephelus daemeli* has the following official conservation status:
 - protected in NSW waters since 1983;
 - protected in Commonwealth waters; and
 - listed by the Australian Society for Fish Biology as potentially threatened.

7. Despite protection in NSW waters since 1983, there is no evidence of an increase in abundance. The curious and territorial nature of *Epinephelus daemeli* makes it extremely vulnerable to spearfishing and both commercial and recreational line fishing.
8. In light of 3, 5, 6 and 7 above, the Fisheries Scientific Committee has determined that *Epinephelus daemeli* is eligible for listing as a VULNERABLE SPECIES in Schedule 5 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, and accordingly that the Schedule be amended by inclusion of that species.

Dr Andrew Sanger
Chairperson
Fisheries Scientific Committee