Stout Whiting
(*Sillago robusta*)

**Background**

Stout whiting (*Sillago robusta*) is a sub-tropical species that occurs in ocean waters to a depth of 70 m around northern Australia from WA to northern NSW. Stout whiting off southern Queensland and northern NSW are thought to belong to a single ‘eastern’ Australian stock.

Both eastern school whiting (*S. flindersi*) and stout whiting are taken by trawling in inshore ocean waters, and the two species may occur in the same trawl catch off northern NSW. Historically both species were reported by fishers as ‘school whiting’ and catches of each species were estimated according to latitude where the catch was taken. Since July 2009, fishers have been required to report the two species separately.

NSW trawlers generally discarded stout whiting until an export market developed in the 1970s. Landings increased to around 300 t in the mid-late 1980s, declined to very low levels in the mid 1990s, and rose again to around 500 t in the late 1990s. The decline in landings around 2000 was apparently associated with the introduction of bycatch reduction devices into the prawn trawl fishery, but catches have recently increased from this level. It is likely that trawlers targeting prawns have continued to discard significant quantities of stout whiting throughout this period.

Stout whiting are not taken in significant quantities by any other commercial or recreational fisheries in NSW. A targeted trawl fishery for stout whiting off southern Queensland has seen declining effort and catch since the mid 1990s. Recent landings have been around 500 - 1000 t annually, from a maximum of 5 vessels participating in the fishery. Stout whiting are also taken as a by-catch of prawn trawling off Queensland, but the bulk of these catches are discarded at sea. The annual discarded catch was estimated to be around 4000 t during the 1990s, however annual discards are estimated to have declined to around 1500 t recently.

There has been considerable research into the biology of stout whiting off southern Queensland. The species reaches a maximum age of eight years and length of 23 cm fork length (FL), although the bulk of catches is comprised of fish from 1 – 2 years of age and 14 to 18 cm FL. Sexual maturity is reached...
at about 2 years of age, at about 15 cm FL. Information on the distribution and size composition of stout whiting off NSW is available from research trawls conducted by Fisheries Research Vessel Kapala.

**Additional Notes**

- This is a short-lived species with no significant recreational fishery.
- The stock is shared with Queensland, whose few operators are managed with catch quotas (currently 1250 t).
- Recent research has provided growth rate and size at maturity estimates for the NSW area.
- Some limited information is available on the size composition of NSW commercial landings, and a recent research project at I & I NSW studied growth and reproductive biology of stout whiting from northern NSW.
- There is no minimum legal length for stout whiting which are included in a combined recreational bag limit of 20 for all whiting.

**Catch**

*Recreational Catch of Stout Whiting*

The annual recreational harvest of stout whiting in NSW is likely to be less than one tonne.

---

**Historical Landings of Stout Whiting**

![Graph showing historical landings of stout whiting](image1)

*Commercial landings (including available historical records) of stout whiting for NSW from 1984/85 to 2008/09 for all fishing methods.*

---

**Landings by Commercial Fishery of Stout Whiting**

![Graph showing landings by commercial fishery of stout whiting](image2)

*Reported landings of stout whiting by NSW commercial fisheries from 1997/98. Fisheries which contribute less than 2.5% of the landings are excluded for clarity and privacy.*

---

**Catch Per Unit Effort Information of Stout Whiting Harvested by Ocean Prawn Trawling in NSW**

![Graph showing catch per unit effort](image3)

*Catch rates of stout whiting harvested using ocean prawn trawling 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.*

---

**Growth Curve of Stout Whiting**

![Graph showing growth curve of stout whiting](image4)

*Age-length data with fitted growth curve of stout whiting (internal data). Lengths are presented as fork length (FL).*
The length distribution of stout whiting from NSW commercial landings in 2000/01 was comprised mainly of fish between 10 and 20 cm fork length (FL). There is no minimum legal length for stout whiting in NSW.

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 330005, common name or scientific name to find further information.