

RECOMMENDATION

PRISTIS ZIJSRON - GREEN SAWFISH

The Fisheries Scientific Committee, established under Part 7A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (the Act), has made a recommendation to support a nomination to list the Green sawfish, *Pristis zijsron* as an ENDANGERED SPECIES in Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Act.

Listing of Endangered Species is provided for by Part 7A, Division 2 of the Act.

The Fisheries Scientific Committee has found that:

1. *Pristis zijsron* Bleeker, 1851 of the family Pristidae is known by the common name Green sawfish as well as Narrowsnout sawfish and Dindagubba. *Pristis zysron* is an invalid spelling used in some of the older literature.
2. *Pristis zijsron* has been recorded in the tropical Indo-West Pacific from eastern Australia and Papua New Guinea through western India with a disjunct population off Mozambique and eastern South Africa (Last & Stevens, 1994:366-367). In Australia the species occurs mainly in the tropics from Broome to southern Queensland, with individuals found as far south as Sydney and a single record from Glenelg, South Australia (Last & Stevens, 1994). In NSW, specimens have been collected from Byron Bay in the north to the Parramatta River in the south, plus a Jervis Bay record without a museum voucher specimen.
3. *Pristis zijsron* is a benthic species which practices internal fertilisation. The species is thought to reach 730 cm and has been reliably recorded at 500 cm. Males mature by 430 cm.
4. *Pristis zijsron* has low fecundity. The exact number of young have not been recorded for Australian specimens, but anecdotal information from other areas indicates sawfishes only have up to 20 young.
5. *Pristis zijsron* has suffered a serious population decline in NSW. The last recorded museum specimen from NSW was in 1972. Prior to this, the species was regularly found in the shallow waters at the mouth of the Tweed, Clarence and Richmond Rivers and on outside beaches such as at Yamba. The last specimen from the Sydney region was taken in 1926.
6. *Pristis zijsron* is not currently included as a threatened species on any State or Commonwealth list. However, it is listed by the Australian Society for Fish Biology as

'Requiring Investigation' and its status will shortly be reviewed by a number of other bodies.

7. The causes of decline in *Pristis zijsron* are likely to include:
- bycatch in shallow prawn trawling. Due to the dangerous nature of the flailing saw (once the sawfish hit the deck), sawfish would rarely have been returned to the water alive;
 - targeted harvest for flesh, fins and saws. The fins command a high price in the shark fin trade and the saws are used in traditional medicine, and sold as curios; and
 - habitat degradation.
8. In light of 4, 5, 6 and 7 above, the Fisheries Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the numbers of *Pristis zijsron* have been reduced to such a critical level that it is in immediate danger of extinction in NSW. Therefore the species qualifies for inclusion in Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* as an ENDANGERED SPECIES.

Dr Andrew Sanger
Chairperson
Fisheries Scientific Committee