

Fisheries Scientific Committee

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PROPOSED DETERMINATION

Pristis zijsron – green sawfish

The Fisheries Scientific Committee, established under Part 7A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (the Act), is proposing to omit *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish from Part 1 of Schedule 4 Endangered Species of the Act and insert *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish into Part 4 of Schedule 4 Species Presumed Extinct of the Act. The amendment of the threatened species lists is provided for by Part 7A, Division 2 of the Act.

The Fisheries Scientific Committee, with reference to the criteria relevant to this species, has found that:

Background

1. *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish is a valid, recognised taxon and is a species as defined in the Act.
2. *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.
3. *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.
4. *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.
5. *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.
6. *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish has the following conservation status:
 - i. NSW *Fisheries Management Act 1994*: Endangered;
 - ii. IUCN 2006: - Critically Endangered;
 - iii. Northern Territory *Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2000*: - Vulnerable;
 - iv. Australian Society for Fish Biology 2001: - Endangered.

Criteria – reduction in abundance, geographic distribution or genetic diversity

1. *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish 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.

Criteria – threatening processes

1. 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.

Conclusion pursuant to section 220F(1) of the Act

In the opinion of the Fisheries Scientific Committee:

- a. *Pristis zijsron* - green sawfish has not been recorded in its known or expected habitat in New South Wales, despite targeted surveys, over a time frame appropriate to its life cycle and form.

The species is eligible to be listed as PRESUMED EXTINCT.

Dr Patricia Dixon
Chair
Fisheries Scientific Committee