

FACT SHEET

Sailfish

Istiophorus platypterus

Family: Istiophoridae

Other common names: Indo-Pacific sailfish, Seilvis

Description

An elongate, streamlined and graceful fish with a long spear-like snout. The large, sail-like dorsal fin is very distinctive. The body is metallic-blue dorsally and white underneath. The cobalt-blue sail is dotted with black markings. There may be a number of light vertical bars along the flanks.

Distribution

Tropical and temperate waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, reaching 45°S in the Western Indian Ocean. It has been suggested that the related Atlantic sailfish (*Istiophorus albicans*) should be treated as the same species. In South African waters sailfish have been recorded as far south as False Bay in the Western Cape but are seldom caught south of KwaZulu-Natal.

Habitat

Epipelagic, found primarily near the surface. Although sailfish have been recorded to depths of 160 m they normally remain above the thermocline. Greatest concentrations of sailfish are found near large land masses or offshore islands.

Feeding

Their prey includes a diversity of small fishes, often those associated with flotsam. They are also known to take squid and mantis shrimps seasonally. May feed in groups by herding shoals of small fish into bait balls.

Movement

They appear to penetrate into the higher latitudes during the summer months returning to more tropical waters during the winter. Migration is probably associated with warm currents. Off the east coast of southern Africa sailfish are seldom caught south of KwaZulu-Natal and it is believed that these fish migrate down from northern Mozambique in summer.

Reproduction

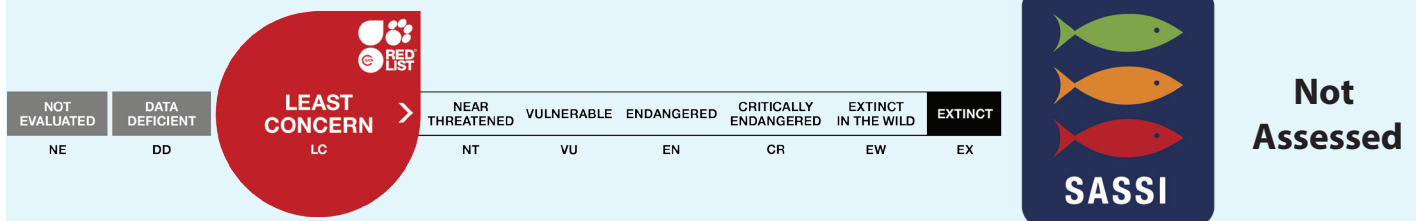
They reach maturity at approximately 150 cm lower jaw fork length and an age of about 3 years. Females usually grow larger than males. Spawning may occur throughout the year in tropical waters with a peak in summer. No spawning has been observed in South African waters.

Age and growth

They can reach a maximum length of 348 cm lower jaw fork length and a weight of 100 kg. They can reach an age of 13 years.

Current status

The status of sailfish in the Indian Ocean is not known. Evaluated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (2010).
South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List:
Not assessed.



Capture

Targeted as a popular gamefish in sport fisheries, not usually targeted but a valued bycatch in artisanal and commercial fisheries throughout their distribution. Caught using a number of methods including trolling, longlining, gill-nets, harpooning, etc. Off South Africa sailfish are primarily targeted by recreational ski-boat anglers in northern KwaZulu-Natal. They take a range of trolled lures and baits and are one of the most exciting fish to catch, being extremely fast and jumping frequently.

Current recreational fishing regulations

Daily bag limit: 5 per person per day
Minimum size limit: None
Closed Season: None
Other regulations: No sale recreational species. However, allowed as a bycatch on pelagic longline vessels operating in South African waters so this is an anomaly in the legislation.
Marine protected areas (MPAs): The highly migratory nature of sailfish does not make them conducive to protection in MPAs.

Reference

Information from the ORI Fish App. www.saambr.org.za



INCORPORATING

