



FACT SHEET

Swordfish

Xiphias gladius

Family: Xiphiidae

Other common names: Broadbill, Swaardvis

Description

A powerful, elongate fish with a long, flat, sword-like bill and no pelvic fins. Overall colour is blackish-brown above fading to light brown below. The caudal peduncle has a single keel on both sides.

Distribution

An oceanic species found in all oceans, including the Mediterranean, Red Sea and North Sea. Found right around southern Africa mostly offshore but is sometimes seen in coastal waters, generally above the thermocline.

Habitat

They can tolerate a wide range of temperatures (5-27°C), the widest temperature tolerance of any billfish, but is often found in surface waters at temperatures over 13°C. They can dive down to depths of 1000 m.

Feeding

They feed on a wide variety of prey including pelagic and bottom-dwelling fish and invertebrates, with cephalopods such as squid being their preferred prey. They are believed to feed throughout the water column. The diet of swordfish is known to vary considerably, both geographically and seasonally.

Movement

Highly migratory, sexually mature fish migrate into tropical waters during winter for spawning and back into temperate or cold waters for feeding in summer.

Reproduction Males reach maturity at 120 cm and females at 170 cm lower jaw fork length equivalent to an age of 1-3 and 6-7 years respectively. Spawning occurs from November-March in the South Atlantic and from October-April in the Indian Ocean. Spawning has been recorded off the southern coast of Brazil between 20 and 30°S in the South Atlantic and off Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean.

Age and growth They can reach a maximum size of 455 cm lower jaw fork length and a weight of 650 kg. They can reach a maximum age of at least 30 years in the Indian Ocean.

Current status In 2011 swordfish were assessed as being optimally exploited in the Indian Ocean. However, catch rates have declined in both the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans but catch data are highly variable. They have been evaluated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (2011). South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Orange.

The diagram shows the IUCN Red List categories: NOT EVALUATED (NE), DATA DEFICIENT (DD), LEAST CONCERN (LC), NEAR THREATENED (NT), VULNERABLE (VU), ENDANGERED (EN), CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR), EXTINCT IN THE WILD (EW), and EXTINCT (EX). A red circle highlights 'LEAST CONCERN LC'. To the right is the SASSI logo featuring three fish (green, orange, red) and the text 'SASSI'. Further right is a dark blue button with a fish icon and the text 'THINK TWICE'.

Capture Swordfish are targeted by South African pelagic longline vessels but are caught by the entire pelagic longline fleet, including foreign flagged vessels. Occasionally targeted by recreational vessels at night or when using deep (> 200 m) down-rigged baits during the day. They are a formidable adversary for big game anglers.

Current recreational fishing regulations
Daily bag limit: 5 per person per day
Minimum size limit: 25 kg
Closed Season: None
Other regulations: Listed as a no sale recreational species but this represents sector specific legislation.
Marine protected areas (MPAs): Swordfish are an open-ocean, highly migratory species. MPAs provide little protection for such widespread, mobile species.

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

