



FACT SHEET

Wreckfish

Polyprion americanus

Family: Polyprionidae

Other common names: Bass groper, Wrakvis

Description

Adults are bluish grey above, paler below with a silvery sheen. Fins are blackish brown in colour. They have a very big mouth with a big head and a rough bony ridge across upper part of the gill cover ending in a short spine. Juveniles have black blotches on the head and body.

Distribution

Primarily Atlantic but also found in the Western Indian Ocean and the Southwest Pacific. Around the southern African coast, they are found from Walvis Bay to northern KwaZulu-Natal. The similar two-tone wreckfish or hapuku (*Polyprion oxygeneios*), is widely distributed in the Indo-Pacific and may also be found off southern Africa. It is bicoloured, the top half brown or grey and the lower half abruptly white or silvery and they are slightly more elongate.

Habitat

Small juveniles up to 50-60 cm are pelagic and associated with floating seaweed and flotsam. Late juveniles 60-70 cm are found on rocky bottoms in depths of 60-250 m. Adults are found at depths of 150-650 m, mostly on high relief rocky bottoms and are often associated with caves and shipwrecks. They prefer temperatures from 6-16°C.

Feeding

Juveniles prey mainly on small pelagic fish such as maasbanker. Adults feed on deepwater crustaceans, squid and fish such as hake.

Movement

Little known but European fishing hooks found in wreckfish caught off the United States suggests that they may travel considerable distances.

Reproduction

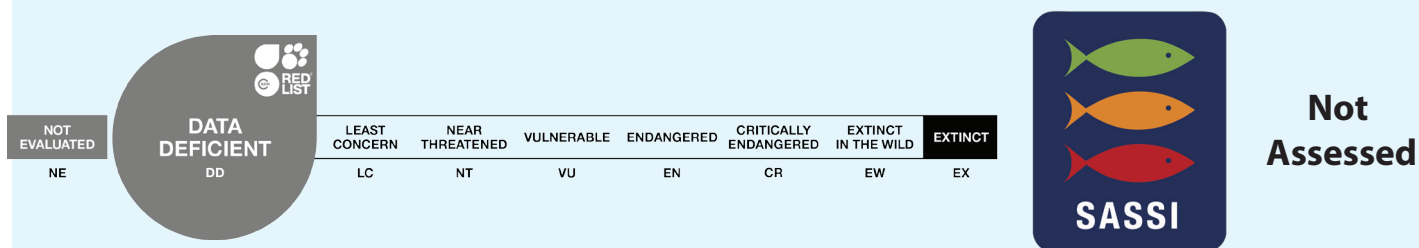
They mature at about 67-90 cm total length and do not change sex. Spawning occurs in summer and they are known to form large spawning aggregations.

Age and growth

They can reach a maximum size of 210 cm total length and a weight of up to 100 kg. They are very slow growing and have been aged up to a maximum of 76 years.

Current status

Not assessed in South Africa but catches are assumed to have declined as has happened in fisheries for this species elsewhere. They have been evaluated as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List (2003). South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Not assessed.



Capture

Wreckfish are occasionally caught as bycatch by ski-boat anglers bottomfishing in deep water when targeting species such as red steenbras. When this occurs attempts should be made to release them using an appropriate down-rigger method. Elsewhere they are targeted using specialized fishing gear including the use of vertical lines and electric reels. Also caught on deep set demersal longlines.

Current recreational fishing regulations

Daily bag limit: Zero
Minimum size limit: Not applicable
Closed Season: Not applicable
Other regulations: Prohibited species
Marine protected areas (MPAs): This species is likely to benefit from protection within well enforced, offshore no-take areas with suitable deep-water rocky habitat throughout their distribution.

Reference

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



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