

Australian Butterfly Ray, *Gymnura australis*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Least Concern	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Least Concern
Global Assessors	Jacobsen, I.P. & White, W.T.		
Australian Assessors	Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T., Simpfendorfer, C.A. (Shark Action Plan) & Rigby, C.L.		
Report Card Remarks	Australian fishing pressure low, common species, significant refuge in marine parks.		

Summary

The Australian Butterfly Ray is a medium-sized and common continental shelf ray distributed across tropical and subtropical waters of Australia, and in southern Papua Province, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. It is caught incidentally in trawl fisheries and sometimes retained for its meat in Papua New Guinea. In Australia, it is one of the more abundant elasmobranchs caught in the Northern Prawn Fishery and is also taken in other state and territory trawl fisheries. It is likely released as



most of these fisheries prohibit elasmobranch retention, although post-release mortality is expected to be low. Although many of the trawl fisheries mandate the use of bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) these have not significantly reduced the catch of this species. Many parts of the species' range across Australia have low fishing effort that is managed and it receives significant refuge in the extensive network of marine parks. The Australian Whipray is assessed globally and in Australia as Least Concern (IUCN) (Kyne et al. 2021) and Sustainable (SAFS) in Australia.

Distribution

The Australian Butterfly Ray is known from tropical and subtropical waters of northern Australia and from southern Papua Province (Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea (Last et al. 2016, White et al. 2017). In Australia, it has a wide range from Broken Bay (New South Wales) to Shark Bay (Western Australia) (Last and Stevens 2009).

Stock structure and status

There is currently little information on population size, structure, or trend for the species. However, the species is common in north and northeast Australia, relatively rare in New South Wales where it has not been reported in recent years, and its abundance in western Australia is unknown (Jacobsen and White 2015).

Fisheries

The Australian Butterfly Ray is a common incidental catch in trawl fisheries and in Papua New Guinea, larger individuals are sometimes retained for the meat (Jacobsen and White 2015, White et al. 2017). In Australia, it is one of the more abundant elasmobranchs captured in the Commonwealth Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF), accounting for 13–15% of the elasmobranch catch (Stobutzki et al. 2002, Tonks et al. 2008). It is also taken in the Queensland East Coast Trawl Fishery, and possibly the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Developmental and Inshore Fisheries. It may be caught in the Northern Territory Demersal Fishery (DF) and Western Australian prawn fisheries and Pilbara Fish Trawl Fishery (Jacobsen and White 2015). Bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) have been mandated in most of these fisheries since the early-mid 2000s; however, they do not significantly reduce the catch of the Australian Butterfly Ray likely due to its relatively small size and morphology (Brewer et al. 2004, Jacobsen and White 2015, Gaughan and Santoro 2021). If it is caught, it would be released as elasmobranch retention is now prohibited, except in the Queensland GoC Inshore Fishery, although post-release mortality is expected to be low as the species is susceptible to injury during trawl capture and release (Jacobsen and White 2015). The Australian Butterfly Ray was considered at low risk of overfishing in the NPF due to estimated fishing mortality being below levels leading to population reduction (Zhou and Griffiths 2008, Zhou et al. 2015). Many parts of the species' Australian range have low fishing effort and the species would receive refuge in the extensive network of marine parks (Kyne et al. 2021, Parks Australia 2023).

Habitat and biology

The Australian Butterfly Ray is demersal on the continental shelf at depths of 0–250 m (Last et al. 2016, Weigmann 2016). Maximum size is at least 94 cm disc width (DW) and males mature at 35–42 cm DW and females at 44–46 cm DW (Jacobsen and White 2015, Last et al. 2016). Litter size is 1–6 pups (Jacobsen and White 2015).

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity: unknown Max size: 94 cm DW
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: 35–42 cm DW Females: 44–46 cm DW

CAAB Code: 37 037001

Link to IUCN Page: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/161342/68624525>

Link to page at Shark References: <https://shark-references.com/species/view/Gymnura-australis>

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