

## Australian Weasel Shark, *Hemigaleus australiensis*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Least Concern	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Least Concern
Assessors	Simpfendorfer, C., White, W.T. & Smart, J.J.		
Australian Assessors	Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T. & Simpfendorfer, C.A. (Shark Action Plan)		
Report Card Remarks	A productive species that is a minor bycatch in managed fisheries		

### Summary

The Australian Weasel Shark is commonly taken as bycatch in prawn and fish trawl fisheries, and gillnet and longline fisheries, but never in particularly large numbers. The species is unlikely to be threatened due to the low level of fisheries throughout the majority of its range and the management regulations in place for those fisheries. The Australian Weasel Shark is also relatively productive, with an average of 16 pups per year per female (based on two pregnancies



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per year) and thus likely to be able to withstand moderate fishing pressure in this region. Therefore, the species is assessed as Least Concern (IUCN) (Kyne et al. 2021) and Sustainable (SAFS).

### Distribution

The Australian Weasel shark occurs in northern Australia from Brunswick Heads (New South Wales) to Geraldton (Western Australia). It possibly also occurs in Papua New Guinea (White et al. 2005).

### Stock structure and status

The species is not particularly common throughout its range and it appears to not be naturally abundant, as with many other weasel sharks (White et al. 2005). There is currently no information on population size, structure, or trend for the species.

### Fisheries

In northern Australia, it is a common bycatch in trawl fisheries, including those for prawns (including the Shark Bay, Exmouth Gulf, Gulf of Carpentaria, and Queensland east coast fisheries) and fish (including the Pilbara trawl fishery) (Simpfendorfer et al. 1999). The species is also landed in northern gillnet fisheries, including in Queensland (East Coast Inshore Finfish Fishery, Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery) and Northern Territory (Offshore Net and Line Fishery). In all of

these gillnet fisheries the numbers caught are small (e.g. Harry et al. 2011) and the overall shark catches controlled by Total Allowable Catches and other management controls. It is considered of low commercial value (Last and Stevens 2009). The species is also taken in gillnet and longline fisheries, but not in large numbers.

### Habitat and biology

The Australian Weasel Shark is known from continental shelves of northern Australia from inshore bays to depths of 170 m (Last and Stevens 2009). The species is also caught in areas adjacent to coral reefs in southern Queensland (Simpfendorfer, James Cook University, pers. comm.). Maximum size is 110 cm total length (TL) with males mature at approximately 60 cm TL and females at 60–65 cm TL (Last and Stevens 2009). Litter size is 1–19 with possibly two pregnancies per year, thus a gestation of less than six months (Last and Stevens 2009).

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity: unknown Max size: 110 cm TL
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: ~60 cm TL Females: 60-65 cm TL

**CAAB Code:** 37 018020

**Link to IUCN Page:** <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/161539/68624897>

**Link to page at Shark References:** <http://www.shark-references.com/species/view/Hemigaleus-australiensis>

### References

- Harry, A.V., Tobin, A.J., Simpfendorfer, C.A., Welch, D.J., Mapleston, A., White, J., Williams, A.J., & Stapley, J. 2011. Evaluating catch and mitigating risk in a multispecies, tropical, inshore shark fishery within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. *Marine and Freshwater Research*, 62(6), 710–721.
- Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T. and Simpfendorfer, C.A. 2021. *The Action Plan for Australian Sharks and Rays 2021*. National Environmental Science Program, Marine Biodiversity Hub, Hobart
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- White, W.T., Last, P.R. and Compagno, L.J.V. 2005. Description of a new species of weasel shark, *Hemigaleus australiensis* n. sp. (Carcharhiniformes: Hemigaleidae) from Australian waters. *Zootaxa* 1077: 37–49.