

For information on fishing rules, or further information about eels, see the following websites:

Ministry of Fisheries

www.fish.govt.nz

National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research Ltd (NIWA)

www.niwascience.co.nz/rc/freshwater/fishatlas/species/anguillidae



Ministry of
Fisheries
Te Tautiaki i nga tini a Tangaroa

New Zealand Shortfin and Longfin Eels

Information for Recreational Fishers

October 2008



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For information on fishing rules
www.fish.govt.nz

Guidelines for the catch and release of shortfin and longfin eels (tuna)

The Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) has prepared this brochure to help raise public awareness about why eels are special. The use of good fishing practices can help conserve shortfin and longfin eels.

Why are eels special?

In comparison to other fish, both shortfin and longfin eels are unusual in the way they reproduce.

As young eels get bigger, they will generally stay in the same area for many years before becoming mature. When an eel reaches maturity, it will stop feeding, and migrate downstream to the sea. They move thousands of kilometres into the South Pacific Ocean to spawn once. Eels release millions of eggs at one time, before they die. Depending on the sex and species, eels will on average reach maturity between 15 and 35 years of age (see table).

Species	Average length at maturity (cm)	Average age at maturity (years)
Shortfin (male)	38-55	15
Shortfin (female)	50-100	25
Longfin (male)	50-75	25
Longfin (female)	75-200	35+

Habitat Loss

Eels need to have suitable habitat throughout their lifetime. There has been substantial human impacts on eel habitat. Since 1840, 90% of New Zealand's wetland areas have been lost.

Land use, land clearance, drainage and pollution have affected the quality and amount of suitable eel habitat available. Barriers such as culverts can seriously affect the upstream migration of juvenile eels. The introduction of dams have also created significant barriers for migrating eels seeking access to the open ocean.

Fishing for eels in New Zealand

Eels have traditionally been targeted for food. They are taonga to Maori (a treasure) and provide a valuable food source to many people in New Zealand.

Commercial catch limits for shortfin and longfin stocks were introduced from 2000 to 2004. To address sustainability concerns, initial catch limits were set below previous levels of commercial catch. Commercial catch levels were further reduced in 2007 to improve the status of eel stocks.

The commercial fishery is also managed using size limits, fishing gear controls, area closures and voluntary measures.

Recreationally caught eels includes eels taken for food, and for fun, and includes catch by Maori not taken under customary authorisation. Recreational catch is managed by the use of daily bag limits and restrictions on fishing gear*.

Eels may be harvested under customary authorisation for purposes such as hui and tangi.

Leaving eels for future generations

Fishing for eels is a popular past-time for many New Zealanders. It is important to fish sustainably to ensure that there are eels for future generations.



**The recreational bag limit is 6 eels per person per day and a person may only use one fyke net to take eels.*

Due to the unique nature of shortfin and longfin eels it is important to encourage recreational fishers who catch eels for fun to return them unharmed to the water. Avoid fishing methods that might cause injury. This will allow them to reach maturity several years later and complete their migration offshore to spawn.

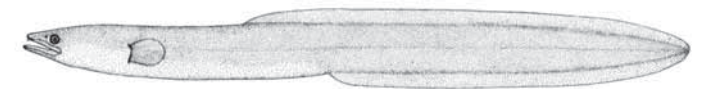
The release of larger eels approaching maturity, particularly females, will help to make sure there are eels for the future.

How can you help?

MFish recommends that recreational fishers:

- > Release eels if not taken for food;
- > Ensure eels returned to the water are unharmed;
- > Consider returning larger eels to the water;
 - shortfin eels above 60 cm (approximately 0.5 kg);
 - longfin eels above 75 cm (approximately 1.3 kg).

These steps will help ensure that eels remain for future generations of New Zealanders to enjoy...



Longfin Eel



Shortfin Eel