



FACT SHEET

ELF

Pomatomus saltatrix

Family: Pomatomidae

Other common names: Shad, Tailor, Bluefish

Description

A streamlined fish that is an overall silver colour. They have a metallic green to blue sheen on the dorsal surface and upper flanks. The teeth are extremely sharp.

Distribution

Circumglobal in warm-temperate to tropical waters. Absent from eastern and north-western Pacific. Occurs along the entire southern African coast but less common between Cape Point and northern Namibia, except within Saldanha Bay. The Angolan stock is genetically separate.

Habitat

A pelagic, shoaling species found over sandy and rocky substrata from the surf-zone down to 100 m. Juveniles prefer shallow subtidal embayments, less than 20 m deep, mainly along the south-eastern and south-western Cape coast.

Feeding

Primarily piscivorous, feeding on species such as anchovies, pilchards and olive grunter, but will also feed on crustaceans and cephalopods.

Movement

Adult and subadult elf migrate seasonally between the Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Adults are common in Cape waters during summer and autumn, and in KwaZulu-Natal waters during winter and spring. The arrival of elf in KwaZulu-Natal coincides with the onset of spawning activity. Northward migrating elf also feed primarily on pilchards, which undertake a similar annual migration northwards from the Agulhas Banks. Most, but not all elf take part in the annual northward migration as some are caught all year round in the Western Cape.

Reproduction

They mature at 25 cm total length and an age of 1 year. Spawning takes place in KwaZulu-Natal waters between spring and summer with peak spawning from October to December. Spawning occurs in nearshore shelf waters in depths of 30-75 m.

Age and growth

They can reach a maximum size of 100 cm total length and a weight of 10.3 kg. They have been aged up to 10 years.

Current status

Despite high inter-annual variability, this species is considered to be overexploited in South African waters with the spawner biomass estimated to be less than 40% of its pristine level. They have been evaluated as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (2015). South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Orange in the Cape Provinces, Red in KwaZulu-Natal.



Cape Provinces



KwaZulu Natal



Capture

Elf is the most important species caught by recreational shore anglers along the entire eastern coast of South Africa. They account for approximately 28-80% of the annual reported catch in the KwaZulu-Natal recreational shore fishery. Also caught in fair numbers by subsistence shore fishers in the Eastern Cape and by the beach seine fishery in the Western Cape. Generally not taken in great numbers by boat-based fisheries except those operating in areas such as False Bay and Struis Baai in the Western Cape. Also taken as a bycatch by the inshore demersal trawl fishery.

Current recreational fishing regulations

Daily bag limit: 4 per person per day
Minimum size limit: 30 cm total length
Closed Season: 1 October to 30 November
Other regulations: May be caught and sold in unlimited numbers by the traditional commercial boat-based linefishery in all provinces except KwaZulu-Natal where commercial capture and sale is prohibited.
Marine protected areas (MPAs): Although elf occur in all coastal MPAs along the South African coast, their highly migratory nature makes them less suitable for area based protection. However, recent evidence of residency in the Langebaan and De Hoop MPAs suggests that some MPAs could play a protective role.

Reference

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



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