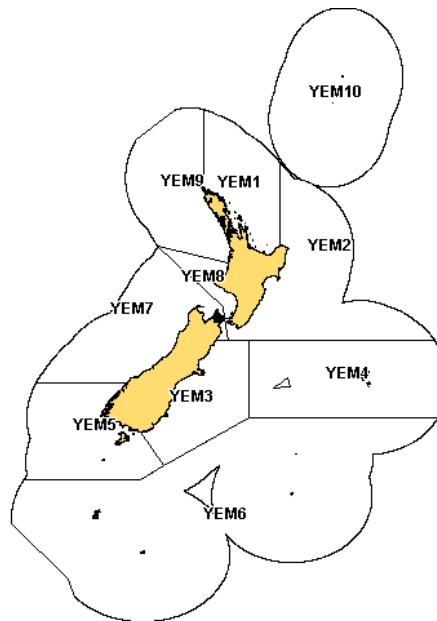


## YELLOW-EYED MULLET (YEM)

(*Aldrichetta forsteri*)



### 1. FISHERY SUMMARY

#### (a) Commercial fisheries

There is very little published information on the commercial fishery for yellow-eyed mullet apart from brief comments about its use as bait. From 1934 to 1972 information from catch records indicate that yellow-eyed mullet was taken by “other nets”, meaning nets other than trawl or Danish seine. Catch by gear-type data from the Fisheries Statistics Unit (FSU) records between 1982–83 and 1988–89, show a predominant use of setnets and gillnets (about 95.5% of total catch) over beach seine and drag net (about 4.5% of total catch).

There is the potential for incorrect assignment of yellow-eyed mullet in landings records because of similarity in the common names of grey mullet and yellow-eyed mullet and the possibility that some fishers refer to both as *mullet*. A second possible classification error may arise from erroneous use of the names *herring* or *sprat*. The level of error in the landings data due to misidentification is not known.

Before 1960 the majority of the recorded catch of yellow-eyed mullet was taken in Northland. Between 1960 and 1968, there was a marked increase in landings from Lake Ellesmere. Regular records are also available for Napier, beginning in 1941, and Manukau Harbour. Apart from Lake Ellesmere, records for the South Island are generally incomplete.

Pre-1980, landings of yellow-eyed mullet by QMA were low, perhaps as a result of under-reporting. Landings increased in the early 1980s due to an increase in landings in QMA 9, and to a lesser extent in QMA 1. In the 1990s landings in QMA1 equaled and often exceeded landings in QMA 9. Landings remained below 20 t in QMA 9 during the past eleven years, with the exception of the 1999–00 catch, which was almost triple that of the previous year and more than double the catch recorded in QMA 1.

The high landings recorded since the mid 1980s most likely reflect increased fishing in the Auckland area in response to an increase in market demand for yellow-eyed mullet. Since the peak total landings in 1996/97 the catch fluctuated around an average of 37 t between 1996/97 to 1999/00. Catches declined to an average of 27 t between 2000/01 and 2003/04, and have shown further declines averaging only 13.5 t in the last two seasons.

Strong seasonal trends are evident in the catch data for each QMA with annual peaks mostly in July-August indicating a winter fishery.

Recent reported landings of yellow-eyed mullet are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Reported landings (t) of yellow-eyed mullet by fishstock and fishing year, 1983–84 to 2005–06. The data in this table has been updated from that published in previous Plenary Reports by using the data through 1996–97 in Table 47 on p. 304 of the “Review of Sustainability Measures and Other Management Controls for the 1999–00 Fishing Year – Final Advice Paper” dated 6 August 1998. There are no landings from FMA 10, which has a TACC of 0.**

Fishstock FMA	YEM 1		YEM 2		YEM 3		YEM 4		YEM 5	
	1		2		3		4		5	
	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC
1982–83	2	-	35	-	3	-	0	-	0	-
1983–84	2	-	28	-	5	-	0	-	0	-
1984–85	12	-	2	-	1	-	0	-	0	-
1985–86	24	-	5	-	7	-	0	-	0	-
1986–87	14	-	10	-	4	-	0	-	0	-
1987–88	11	-	9	-	9	-	0	-	0	-
1988–89	3	-	1	-	4	-	0	-	0	-
1989–90	1	-	9	-	17	-	0	-	0	-
1990–91	21	-	12	-	13	-	0	-	0	-
1991–92	15	-	22	-	23	-	0	-	0	-
1992–93	32	-	13	-	1	-	1	-	0	-
1993–94	53	-	34	-	2	-	0	-	0	-
1994–95	32	-	41	-	1	-	0	-	0	-
1995–96	19	-	68	-	2	-	0	-	0	-
1996–97	32	-	89	-	7	-	<1	-	0	-
1997–98	10	-	31	-	<1	-	0	-	0	-
1998–99	16	10	34	1	7	6	0	0	0	0
1999–00	10	10	48	1	7	6	0	0	0	0
2000–01	9	10	21	1	5	6	0	0	0	0
2001–02	6	20	8	2	<1	8	0	0	0	0
2002–03	9	20	<1	2	4	8	0	0	0	0
2003–04	4	20	<1	2	6	8	0	0	0	0
2004–05	4	20	<1	2	1	8	0	0	<1	0
2004–05	3	20	1	2	3	8	0	0	0	0

Fishstock FMA	YEM 6		YEM 7		YEM 8		YEM 9		Total	
	6		7		8		9			
	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC
1982–83	0	-	0	-	5	-	5	-	17	-
1983–84	0	-	0	-	5	-	26	-	26	-
1984–85	0	-	3	-	3	-	33	-	33	-
1985–86	0	-	4	-	2	-	61	-	61	-
1986–87	0	-	6	-	0	-	68	-	68	-
1987–88	0	-	4	-	0	-	43	-	43	-
1988–89	0	-	5	-	0	-	21	-	21	-
1989–90	0	-	0	-	3	-	11	-	11	-
1990–91	0	-	10	-	0	-	21	-	21	-
1991–92	0	-	14	-	1	-	25	-	25	-
1992–93	0	-	2	-	5	-	31	-	31	-
1993–94	0	-	3	-	4	-	20	-	20	-
1994–95	0	-	8	-	2	-	18	-	18	-
1995–96	0	-	4	-	0	-	10	-	10	-
1996–97	0	-	5	-	2	-	11	-	58	-
1997–98	0	-	0	-	0	-	2	-	12	-
1998–99	0	0	2	4	<1	2	9	33	34	56
1999–00	0	0	1	4	<1	2	26	33	44	56
2000–01	0	0	<1	4	<1	2	12	33	28	56
2001–02	0	0	3	5	0	3	15	30	24	68
2002–03	0	0	<1	5	<1	3	19	30	34	68
2003–04	0	0	1	5	0	3	11	30	22	68
2004–05	0	0	0	5	<1	3	7	30	13	68
2005–06	0	0	0	5	4	3	4	30	14	68

Commercial catches of yellow-eyed mullet have been well below the TACC in each QMA since it was introduced into the QMS in 1 October 1998.

**(b) Recreational fisheries**

Yellow-eyed mullet are a popular recreational species throughout New Zealand, particularly in QMA 1. Estimated numbers of fish and harvest tonnages for yellow-eyed mullet taken by recreational fishers are presented in Table 2.

The survey data have a number of sources of uncertainty. For example, there is a level of misidentification arising from similarity in the common names grey mullet and yellow-eyed mullet, and erroneous use of the names *herring* or *sprat*. The level of assignment to the general mullet category “MUU” is also unknown. Estimates of the number of fish and harvest tonnage are presented for MUU in part (iii) of Table 2.

**Table 2: Estimated number of yellow-eyed mullet and unassigned mullet (MUU) harvested by recreational fishers by Fishstock and survey. Surveys were carried out in different years in Ministry of Fisheries regions: South in 1991–92, Central in 1992–93, North in 1993–94 (Bradford, 1996) and National in 1996 (Bradford, 1998) and 1999–00 (Boyd & Reilly, 2005). Estimates of CV and harvest tonnages are not presented where sample sizes are considered too small. The mean weight (100 g) used to convert numbers to catch weight is from Manikiam (1963) and considered the best available estimate. Survey tonnages are presented as a range to reflect the uncertainty in the estimate. It is assumed that some proportion of unassigned mullet are yellow-eyed mullet.**

Fishstock	Survey	Total		Estimated Harvest Range (t)	Point Estimate (t)
		Number	CV (%)		
1991-92					
QMA1	South	1000			
QMA3	South	29 000	34	1–5	
QMA7	South	3000			
QMA9	South	2000			
1992-93					
QMA1	Central	14 000			
QMA2	Central	57 000			
1993-94					
QMA1	North	289 000	15	25–33	
QMA2	North	7000			
QMA8	North	1000			
QMA9	North	52 000	33	2–8	
1996					
Yellow eyed mullet					
QMA1	National	91 000	14	5–15	9
QMA2	National	80 000	–	–	–
QMA3	National	38 000	–	–	–
QMA5	National	2000	–	–	–
QMA7	National	66 000	19	5–10	7
QMA8	National	74 000	21	5–10	7
QMA9	National	31 000	–	–	–
Unassigned mullet					
QMA1	National	43 000	23	3–5	4
QMA2	National	1000	–	–	–
QMA3	National	6000	–	–	–
QMA7	National	16 000	–	–	–
QMA8	National	5000	–	–	–
QMA9	National	1000	–	–	–
1999-00					
YEM 1	National	342 000	28	12-21	–
YEM 2	National	432 000	72	6-36	–
YEM 3	National	168 000	29	6-11	–
YEM 5	National	7000	88	0-1	–
YEM 7	National	86 000	37	3-6	–
YEM 8	National	89 000	33	3-6	–
YEM 9	National	127 000	53	3-10	–

A key component of the estimating recreational harvest from diary surveys is determining the proportion of the population that fish. The Recreational Working Group has concluded that the methodological framework used for telephone interviews produced incorrect eligibility figures for the 1996 and previous surveys. Consequently the harvest estimates derived from these surveys are

considered to be considerably underestimated and not reliable. However, relative comparisons can be made between stocks within these surveys. The Recreational Working Group considered that the 2000 survey using face-to-face interviews better estimated eligibility and the associated recreational harvest estimates are believed to be more accurate. QMA 2 catches are nevertheless considered to be over-estimate, because of an unrepresentative diarist sample. The 1999/2000 Harvest estimates for each Fishstock should be evaluated with reference to the coefficient of variation.

(c) **Maori customary fisheries**

No quantitative information is available on the current level of Maori customary take.

(d) **Illegal catch**

No quantitative information is available on the level of illegal catch.

(e) **Other sources of mortality**

No quantitative estimates are available about the impact of other sources of mortality on yellow-eyed mullet stocks. Yellow-eyed mullet principally occur in sheltered harbour and estuarine ecosystems. Some of these habitats are known to have suffered environmental degradation.

## 2. BIOLOGY

The yellow-eyed mullet, *Aldrichetta forsteri* (Cuvier & Valenciennes, 1836), is a member of the Mugilidae family (mulletts). It is found in New Zealand, Norfolk Island and Australia. Its range extends from North Cape to Stewart Island in New Zealand and from the Murchison River in Western Australia, across South Australia and around Tasmania, to the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales. It is typically a schooling species that occurs commonly along coasts, in estuaries and in lower river systems, with juveniles sometimes observed in freshwater where they have been observed feeding on algae. In New Zealand, the species is widely but erroneously known as herring.

Yellow-eyed mullet are omnivorous and feed on a wide range of food types including algae, crustaceans, diatoms, molluscs, insect larvae, fish, polychaetes, coelenterates, fish eggs and detritus.

Egg development begins in July and maturity occurs by late December. Generally, spawning is during summer from late December to mid-March although there is some evidence in females from Canterbury to suggest biennial spawning, with peaks in winter and summer. Yellow-eyed mullet appear to leave their estuarine habitat to spawn in coastal waters, with eggs and larvae being found in surface waters up to 33 km offshore. There is no information available on the age of recruitment into estuarine systems of New Zealand waters.

Within estuaries and river systems, yellow-eyed mullet are separated to some extent by age, with older fish preferring more saline water and juveniles sometimes found in freshwater. The larger fish also prefer deeper water than juveniles.

M was estimated from the equation  $M = \log_e 100 / \text{maximum age}$ , where maximum age is the age to which 1% of the population survives in an unexploited stock. Using 7 years for the maximum age results in an estimate of  $M = 0.66$ . The maximum age used here is for a yellow-eyed mullet taken in Wellington Harbour in 1963.

Biological parameters relevant to stock assessment are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Estimates of biological parameters of yellow-eyed mullet.**

<b>Fishstock</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>1. Natural mortality (M)</b>		
Wellington Harbour	0.66 for both sexes	NIWA (unpub. data)
<b>2. Weight = a (length)<sup>b</sup></b> (Weight in g, length in cm fork length)		
Both sexes combined		
Lake Ellesmere	a = 0.000239   b = 3.2	Gorman (1962)

### 3. STOCKS AND AREAS

No information is available to determine the stock structure of yellow-eyed mullet in New Zealand waters. Because catches are generally taken locally within harbours and estuarine systems that are relatively easy to identify, boundaries for Fishstocks should take this natural division into account.

### 4. STOCK ASSESSMENT

#### (a) Estimates of fishery parameters and abundance

No estimates of fishery parameters or stock abundance are available for yellow-eyed mullet.

#### (b) Biomass estimates

Biomass estimates are not available for any stocks.

#### (c) Estimation of Maximum Constant Yield (MCY)

Estimates of MCY are not available.

#### (d) Estimation of Current Annual Yield (CAY)

No estimates of current biomass, fishing mortality, or other information are available which would permit the estimation of CAY.

#### (e) Other Factors

Because of the highly localised nature of the fishery and the relatively high landings taken recently, particularly in the Manukau Harbour, yellow-eyed mullet may be susceptible to localised depletion.

Concern has been expressed by the Working Group about the effects of the small-meshed nets used to fish yellow-eyed mullet on other species within estuarine systems. For example, species such as grey mullet may suffer increased pressure as a consequence of increased target fishing for yellow-eyed mullet.

## 5. STATUS OF THE STOCKS

Estimates of current and reference biomass are not available. It is not known if recent catch levels are sustainable or at levels that will allow the stock to move towards a size which will support the MSY.

TACCs and reported landings for the 2005/06 fishing year are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: Summary of TACCs (t), and reported landings (t) of yellow-eyed mullet for the most recent fishing year.**

Fishstock		FMA	2005–06	2005–06
			Actual TACC	Estimated landings
YEM 1	Auckland (East)	1	20	3
YEM 2	Central (East)	2	2	1
YEM 3	South-east (Coast)	3	8	3
YEM 4	South-east (Chatham)	4	0	0
YEM 5	Southland	5	0	0
YEM 6	Sub-Antarctic	6	0	0
YEM 7	Challenger	7	5	0
YEM 8	Central (West)	8	3	4
YEM 9	Auckland (West)	9	30	4
YEM 10	Kermadec	10	0	0
Total			68	15

## 6. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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