



# Large-tooth Sawfish *Pristis pristis*

(formerly known as the Freshwater Sawfish *Pristis microdon*\*)

## \*What's in a name?

Scientists recently discovered that what was thought to be three different species of sawfish are in fact the same species. The name previously used in Australia, Freshwater Sawfish *Pristis microdon*, is no longer valid.

## Distribution

Four populations worldwide:

- 1 Indo-West Pacific Ocean;
- 2 Eastern Pacific Ocean;
- 3 Western Atlantic Ocean;
- 4 Eastern Atlantic Ocean.

In northern Australia: rivers, estuaries and coastal waters of the Kimberley (WA), NT, Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York, QLD. Vagrant to the southwest.

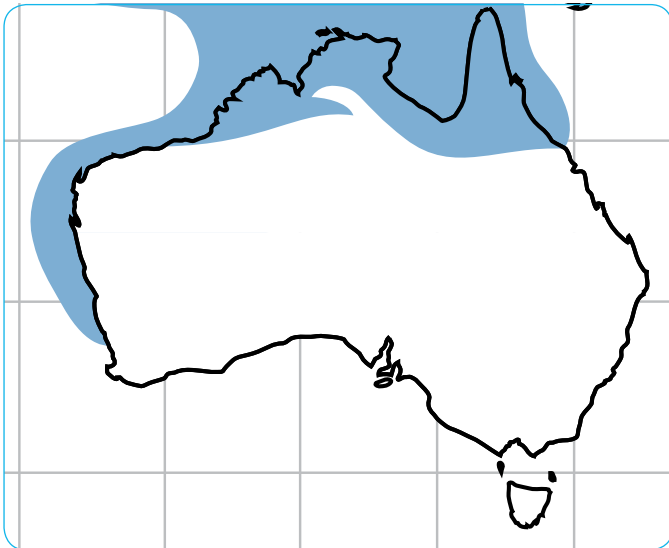


Photo: Kate Buckley, Territory Wildlife Park.

## Conservation Status

**International (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species):**  
**Critically Endangered**

**Australia:** **Vulnerable**

**Northern Territory:** **Vulnerable**

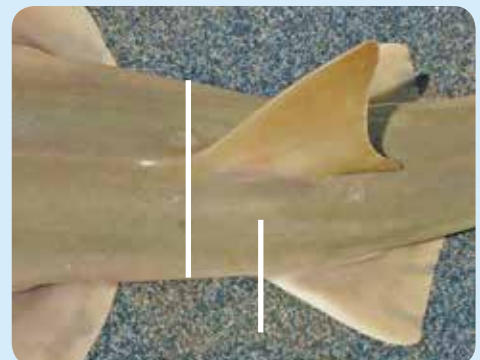
- Large-tooth Sawfish is a protected species throughout Australia.
- It has declined across its global range and in some regions is locally extinct.
- Northern Australia represents the last population stronghold (although its status here is also of conservation concern).

## Large-tooth Sawfish Identification

Rostral teeth evenly-spaced and occur along the whole rostrum:



Front of the first dorsal fin is well forward of the pelvic fins:



## Large-tooth Sawfish Biology

- Young sawfish born at river mouths migrate upstream.
- They inhabit rivers and billabongs, sometimes 100s of kms from the coast.
- After 4-5 years they migrate back to estuaries and marine waters.
- Size at birth is ~70-90 cm long.
- Age of maturity is 8-10 years old.
- Maximum size is >6.5 m long.
- Pregnant females carry up to 12 young.
- Sawfish have low productivity, which limits their ability to recover from depletion.
- Overall, ecology is still poorly known.

## Research

This Marine Biodiversity Hub Project is gaining a better understanding of sawfish to inform management.

DNA is collected to look at the family tree of each fish. Mathematical models are used to estimate the population size and trend (decreasing, increasing or stable).

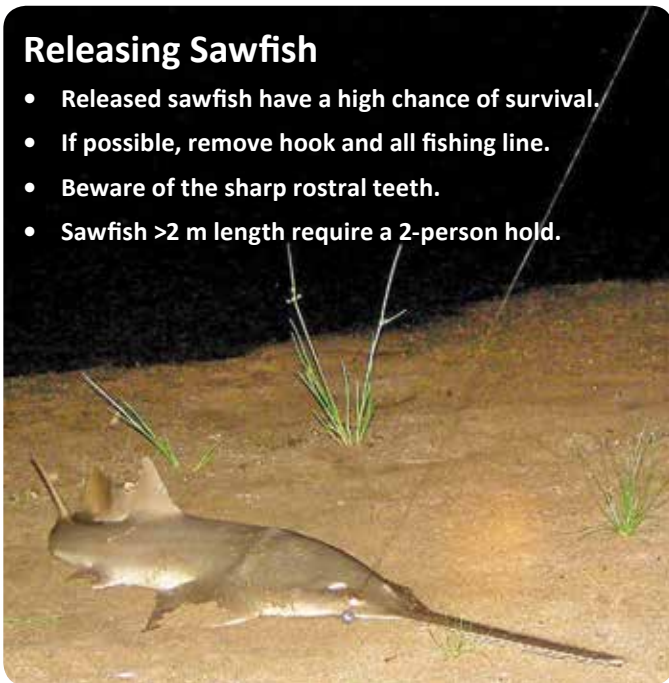
Sawfish are tagged to monitor movements, determine critical habitats and estimate natural mortality.

## Habitat



## Releasing Sawfish

- Released sawfish have a high chance of survival.
- If possible, remove hook and all fishing line.
- Beware of the sharp rostral teeth.
- Sawfish >2 m length require a 2-person hold.



## Seen a Sawfish?

If you've seen or caught a sawfish, please send details to: [peter.kyne@cdu.edu.au](mailto:peter.kyne@cdu.edu.au) or call (08) 8946 7616

### Include:

- Location of sighting or capture
- Date
- Size (if possible)
- Photographs

**Remember: Large-tooth Sawfish are protected. Keeping the rostrum as a trophy will kill the animal. Release it safely to ensure its survival, and that of the species.**

*Prepared by Peter Kyne, Charles Darwin University.*



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities



Australian Government



### Further information:

Peter Kyne  
T (08) 8946 7616  
[Peter.Kyne@cdu.edu.au](mailto:Peter.Kyne@cdu.edu.au)



The NERP Marine Biodiversity Hub is supported through funding from the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program, administered by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC). Our goal is to support marine stakeholders in evidence-based decision making for marine biodiversity management. Stakeholders include DSEWPaC, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA) and the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS).