



Australian Smelt *Retropinna semoni*

DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS

Australian smelt is a native Australian fish. It is a small slender fish with large eyes and a slightly rounded mouth. Its dorsal fin is small and set well back on its body. The tail fin is slightly forked. When males reach sexual maturity its fins are noticeably larger. Colouring is usually olive on the back to bright silver on the flanks, with a silver-white belly. This species is virtually transparent in colour, so much so, that organs and bones are sometimes visible!



Photo by Gunther Schmida. Sourced from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.

BIOLOGY AND LIFE CYCLE

This species prefers slow flowing or still waters, and is often found in billabongs, dams, lakes and slower sections of streams. It completes its entire lifecycle in freshwater although there have been reports of diadromous populations (fish that migrate between fresh and saltwater). They are pelagic and found in great numbers or schools of several thousand individuals.

Australian smelt reach a maximum of about 10 cm, although are more commonly only about 7.5 cm. They spawn in the spring time when waters are above

15 degrees Celsius. The eggs are spherical, transparent, adhesive and about 0.8 mm in diameter. Eggs are demersal, sinking to the bottom where they stick to vegetation, the bottom substrate or debris. The female can carry between 100 and 1,000 eggs. Hatching occurs between 9 and 10 days after spawning and the larvae are about 5 mm in length. At one year of age they reach sexual maturity, and have a life expectancy of only three years.

Australian smelt feed on a variety of planktonic organisms, micro-crustaceans and small aquatic insects.

DISTRIBUTION

Widespread and common in Victorian waters north and south of the Great Dividing Range.

CONSERVATION STATUS IN VICTORIA

Abundant throughout its natural range.

KEY THREATS

This species is a common forage fish for many predatory species including introduced and larger native fish.