

Shortfin eels

Anguilla australis

Native

Not threatened

Shortfin eels are found in New Zealand, Australia and throughout the South Pacific. They live mainly in lowland waterways and generally do not go as far upriver as the longfin eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*). They prefer cover and primarily eat aquatic insects, snails, crustaceans and when larger they also eat other fish.

Shortfin eels may reach lengths of up to 1200mm and weigh around 3.5kg. The larger, heavier shortfin eels are typically females with most males reaching sizes of only 600mm. Adults mature at around 15 (males) and 30 (females) years of age. The adults migrate to somewhere near the western subtropical pacific islands (perhaps Fiji/ Tahiti area) to spawn 1-3 million eggs. The larvae return, via ocean currents, to freshwater ecosystems. Both shortfin and longfin eels reproduce once, and will die after reproducing. Therefore, it is only the offspring that return to freshwaters, and any eels seen in freshwater have never spawned.

The most distinctive feature of the shortfin is the difference in origin between the dorsal and anal fins. On the shortfin, the difference in origin is small (both originating halfway along the eel) whereas on the longfin, the dorsal fin begins two-thirds of the way along the back (see photo).

Shortfins are more abundant than the threatened longfin, and it is appreciated if members of the public returned longfins to the stream when caught.

Photo: <http://www.waitakere.govt.nz/abtctit/ei/ecowtr/esturinelife/shortfineel.asp>



Fin origins of the longfin eel (top) and shortfin eel (bottom).

Photo: Bruno David