

Longfin eel

Anguilla dieffenbachii

Native

Declining

The longfin eel is a native, endemic species classified as 'declining'. Their distribution is widespread including streams some 314km inland. They are skilful climbers, especially when small (<120mm) and can negotiate very steep waterfalls.

Longfin eels are relatively long lived animals (100+ years) which can only reproduce once. Like many other New Zealand native fish, longfin eels require access to both freshwater and marine environments at some stage in their lives. Spawning grounds are unknown but thought to be somewhere near Tonga. Before migrating, the shape and physiology of the longfins change with the heads becoming less dome-like in shape and enlarging of the eyes.

The most distinctive feature is the difference in origin between the top (dorsal) and bottom (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).

Longfin eels are highly valued commercially and by Maori. However, longfins are less abundant than the shortfin eel, and it is appreciated if any longfins caught are returned to the stream.

Photo: Waikato Regional Council, Bruno David



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