



**Marine  
and Coastal**

**National Environmental Science Program**

## **Sawfish bycatch mitigation workshop for northern Australia fisheries**

**Project 1.25**

### **Project Summary**

The project will coordinate a workshop with state and commonwealth fishery managers, industry representatives, fisheries biologists, researchers, Department of Water and the Environment (DAWE) recovery plan team, Non-Government Organisations (NGO) and Traditional Owners to understand the issues around sawfish bycatch and develop methods to improve data recording to enable estimates of sawfish catch rates. The long-term goal of the project is to collectively formulate a draft nationwide monitoring strategy for sawfish that will enable DAWE to assess the status of sawfish and assess the effectiveness of the recovery plan actions and whether mitigation measures are having an impact on sawfish populations.

### **Problem**

While the three *Pristis* species have been included in the multi-species recovery plan for sawfish and river sharks there has been limited success in establishing population estimates for sawfish in Australia largely due to their rarity combined with a lack of commercial fisheries bycatch data. Misidentification, combined with limited observer coverage, in inshore gillnet fisheries compound this issue.

### **How Research Addresses the Problem**

The workshop will bring together a range of state and commonwealth researchers, industry, managers and policy experts with the long term goal of improving data collection the number of sawfish captured as bycatch in northern Australian fisheries. This will result in improved reporting and data that will enable the status of this group to be evaluated.

## General Project Information

The workshop will include representatives from state, territory and commonwealth fishery and management agencies with an interest in sawfish conservation and management. Sawfish researchers, Traditional Owners and NGO's will also be invited to participate in the workshop.

By characterising the current approaches for monitoring sawfish bycatch in the various state and commonwealth fisheries, we aim to conduct a gap-analysis that will inform a draft nationwide monitoring strategy for sawfish. Adoption of this will enable DAWE to assess the status of sawfish and assess the effectiveness of the recovery plan actions and determine whether mitigation measures are having an impact on sawfish populations.

Improved sawfish reporting and identification will result in estimates of bycatch across northern Australia that are currently lacking.



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Juvenile largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*) in the upstream freshwater reaches of the Daly River, NT. Image Credit: Richard Pillans

**LEFT:** Sub-adult dwarf sawfish (*Pristis clavata*) captured during surveys of the Victoria River, NT. The toothed rostrum (saw) makes sawfish highly susceptible to capture in both gillnets and prawn nets. Their large size (> 5 m TL) and toothed rostrum make removing animals from nets a challenge. Image Credit: Richard Pillans

**ABOVE:** A sub-adult green sawfish (*Pristis zijsron*) captured in a gillnet in the Skardon River, Gulf of Carpentaria. Image Credit: Richard Pillans

## Project Lead

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