



Media Alert

From the Department of Natural Resources and Environment

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THE MYSTERIOUS LIFE OF THE ROCK FLATHEAD

The rock flathead are an important component of Victoria's bay and inlet fisheries, particularly in Corner Inlet but, until now, little has been known about the flathead's life history.

Scientists from the Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute have begun a two year study to develop a stock assessment model crucial for the management of a sustainable rock flathead fishery.

MAFRI's Matt Koopman has examined approximately 1200 rock flathead in the 12 months to January this year with some surprising revelations.

He found that female rock flathead grew faster and bigger than the males, the oldest being a 19 year old female 55 centimetres long. The largest fish caught was 57 centimetres. It was previously thought they only grew to 50 centimetres. Mr Koopman also found that individual fish grew at quite different rates.

"Big fish are not necessarily old fish. For example a 4 year old male fish could be between 28 and 39 centimetres while a female measuring 40 centimetres could be 4 years old, or 10 years old."

He also said that rock flathead spawn from September through to February and that the data suggested rock flathead aggregated according to sex. Some catches are heavily dominated by males and others by females.

The project is being funded by Fisheries Victoria and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.