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REEL NEWS

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Search for baby Dhufish begins

One of the biggest mysteries facing fisheries scientist in WA is the locations and habitats of juvenile dhufish. The general ecological traits of this iconic species have been studied for many years and are well known. Over these years, however, very few juvenile dhufish (less than 150 mm in length) have ever been observed or collected.

The first step towards solving this mystery took place in March this year when the Department of Fisheries hosted a Juvenile Dhufish Workshop.



This workshop brought together a wide range of stakeholders including managers and scientists as well as commercial and recreational fishing representatives. It also included a scientist from Queensland who has had great success in finding juveniles of the closely related Pearl Perch.

The objective of the workshop was to compile all biological, ecological and anecdotal information on the early life history of dhufish and provide a plan as to where and how to start searching. The report from this workshop is available on the Department's website:

<http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/docs/frr/frr210/frr210.pdf>



Equipped with this information, fisheries researchers will start the search this week aboard the *RV Naturaliste*. This fieldwork will focus on places where small juvenile dhufish have been found in the past. Researchers will be employing multiple methods in this expedition including towed and baited underwater video, fish traps of various sizes and small trawl nets.

It is hoped that this project will identify critical habitats and locations of juvenile dhufish which will greatly increase our understanding of this species. It may also potentially lead to the development of an index of dhufish recruitment to aid in future management.

If you have any information that may help solve the mystery of the juvenile dhufish please contact Recfishwest. It is worth noting that a small species of fish known as gobbleguts, which are common in the Swan River, look similar and are often mistaken for juvenile dhufish.

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