Western Australia
Fish Fact Sheet

Black Bream

(Acanthopagrus butcheri)

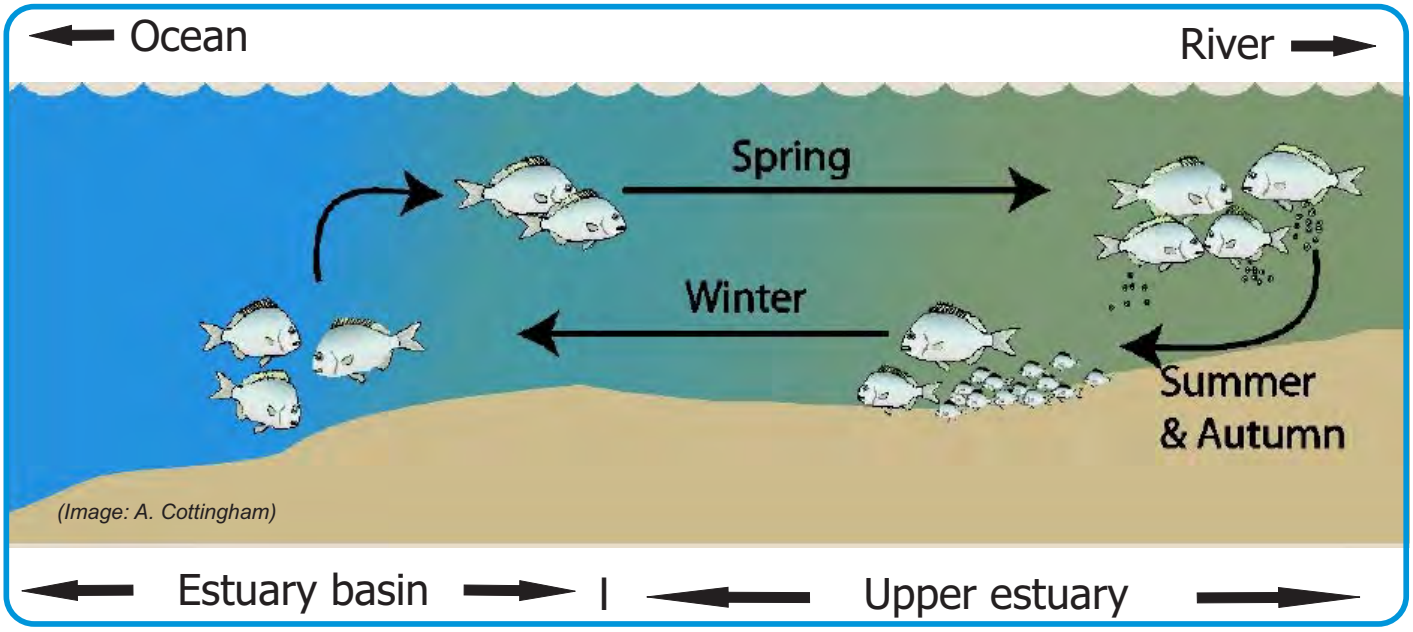

(Image: Massimo Salomone)

An estuarine species

Black bream are the most targeted estuarine fish in Western Australia. They range from Esperance to Kalbarri and can handle waters that range from freshwater to hyper saline (saltier than the ocean!)

These fish spend their entire life within the same estuary system and so are highly reliant on healthy habitats within that system. While these fish are extremely hardy, changes to their habitat and environment will have a negative impact on them.

Black bream are constantly moving between estuaries and rivers within their system, using a wide range of habitats. While they spend much of their time holding up under snags and natural woody debris that have fallen into the water, during feeding times they will venture onto shallow sand flats and weed banks to search for food. Larger mature fish are more often found in the deeper holes in rivers and estuaries while juvenile fish seek protection in shallower habitats.



Black Bream

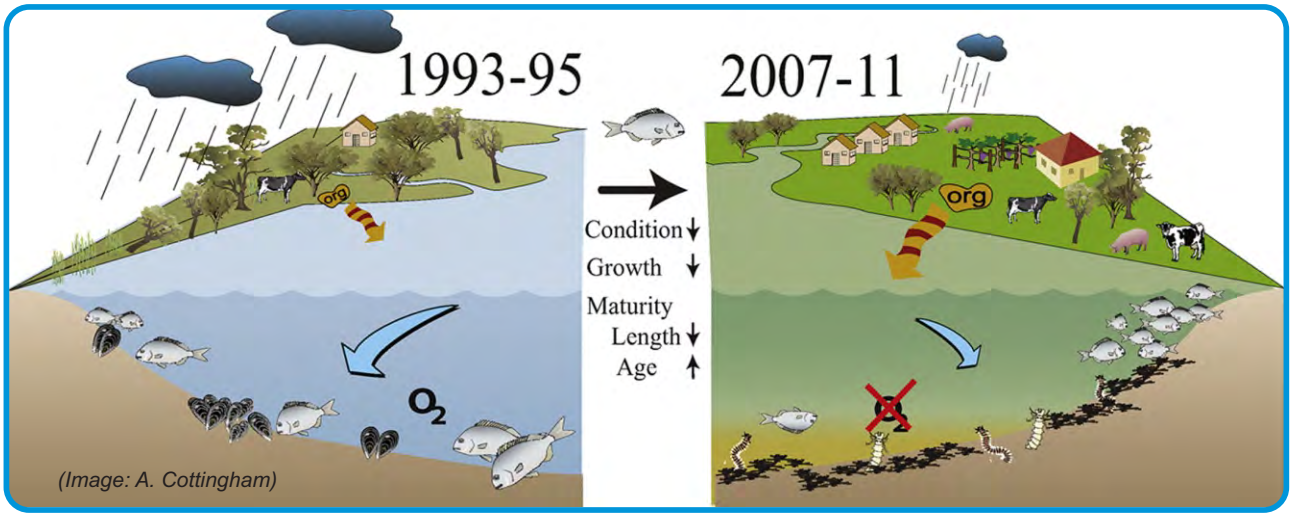
Threats to Habitat

Decreased oxygen in deep water habitat caused by nutrient rich runoff and decreased rainfall.

Loss of productive feeding sites such as wetlands, oyster reefs and shoreline vegetation.

Impact on black bream

- Increased competition between mature and juvenile bream in shallow water habitats may be contributing to decreasing growth rates.
- Reduced survival of recruits.
- Changing diet and decreased growth rates of bream.



(Image: A. Cottingham)

Decreased oxygen availability in the deeper sections of rivers is forcing mature bream into shallower habitats. This leads to increased competition for food and decreased growth rates. Black bream now take around twice as long to reach maturity as they did ten years ago in some systems.

What can you do?

- Help reduce nutrient rich runoff by not fertilizing gardens during winter or before rains.
- Restore riparian vegetation - this will help filter runoff and provides new feeding sites and habitat for bream in shallow areas.


Photo: Tony Tropiano