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Status of yellowfish populations in South African waters

(WRC Consultancy KB/719)

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YELLOWFISH WORKING GROUP



Mission statement

To promote the long-term conservation of yellowfish as a flagship group within their natural habitats through sustainable utilisation practices, and as a means to create an awareness of conservation with the relevant decision makers.

FOREWORD

Living things, together with their environment, make up what ecologists call an ecosystem. The most fundamental property of an ecosystem is that it is interactive – any change in any component of the system gives rise to changes that subsequently affect the entire system. Humans have proved to be an exceptionally successful species; more so than any other. But, in common with all organisms, we have certain requirements of life which we must obtain from the environment and to a considerable extent those requirements have had a very detrimental effect on the environment. Like all other organisms, we are not self-sufficient and in order to remain vigorous and healthy we need a full and rich environment.

There are many ways to determine whether an ecosystem is in good health and functioning correctly. One of these is to select a specific organism which, if it is prospering in a particular environment, indicates to us that not only are its requirements being met, but also the needs of the other inhabitants of that ecosystem. An organism that meets these criteria is commonly referred to as a “flagship species”.

Yellowfishes are African fishes – nine species occur from the Zambezi River southwards; a tenth is confined to the upper Zambezi and Okavango systems. Four of these species are endemic to the RSA. In this publication we are focusing on the nine species that occur in the Republic and its neighbouring countries. First, we assess and report on the state of the yellowfishes in our rivers in this year, 2007. This will establish a benchmark whereby, in future, the success or failure of any action taken (or not taken) may be judged. Second, we look at the social and economic benefits of yellowfishes and some of the controversies that surround these issues.

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