



# Swordfish Fact Sheet



Image courtesy of Duane Raver

## Basic Biology

Latin name: *Xiphias gladius*

Range: Throughout the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean from Canada to Argentina on the western side and from Norway to South Africa on the eastern side of the Atlantic

Habitat: Open water

Diet: Fish and invertebrates such as squid

Age and growth: Growth is rapid at young ages; females grow faster and to larger sizes than males; the majority of females are sexually mature by age five; lifespan is about nine years

## Sustainability

- Swordfish are a highly migratory species, likely to travel across the ocean, and are managed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), comprised of a number of countries who have fisheries for large, tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean.
- The North Atlantic catch peaked in 1987, but by 2005 had decreased by 40% in response to management by ICCAT. According to the most recent stock assessment (2006) the swordfish population level had rebounded to a size of 99% of the target sustainable levels and the fishing mortality is 14% below the maximum allowable rate.
- Current management includes a limit on the Total Allowable Catch; minimum size limits to allow an appropriate number of swordfish to reach sexual maturity before they are captured; and time and area closures to reduce bycatch and harvest of immature fish.
- The primary gear used to harvest swordfish is the longline, a method by which multiple hooks are hung from a horizontal line stretching along many miles and left to fish over a period of hours. U.S. longline fishermen are required to use circle hooks and mackerel bait to reduce the incidental catch of sea turtles and participate in workshops on the safe handling of turtles. In addition, longline vessels must carry a Vessel Monitoring System (satellite tracking) and must move gear after any interaction with a protected species (turtles, marine mammals etc). Longline vessels are also randomly selected to carry fisheries observers to collect data on harvest, bycatch and protected species interactions.

## Info for Chefs and Servers

- A swordfish boycott in the late 1990s taught many consumers that they should not eat swordfish because the population was severely depleted and the harvest method (longline) was unsustainable. Due to effective management the previously depleted North Atlantic swordfish population has recovered to a sustainable level. The U.S. has mandated a number of changes in the harvest gear and has closed large areas of the ocean to longline fishing to lessen the amount of bycatch in the swordfish fishery. Because of these modifications the U.S. swordfish fishery is considered sustainable.