Eels

Wetlands in the Illawarra are home to native eels - the Short-finned eel *(Anguilla australis)* and the Long-finned eel *(Anguilla reinhardtii).*

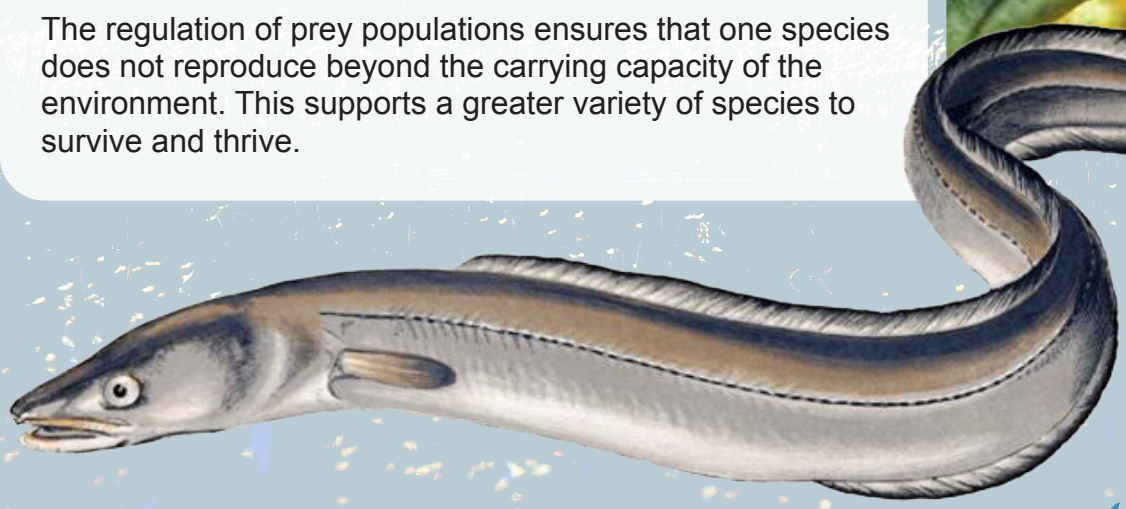
Longfin Eel, Anguilla reinhardtii
Image by David Paul

Why are eels important?

Eels play a key role in freshwater ecosystems. As a high-order predator eels help regulate other species populations which is important in maintaining freshwater biodiversity.

The regulation of prey populations ensures that one species does not reproduce beyond the carrying capacity of the environment. This supports a greater variety of species to survive and thrive.

Image by
Gunther Schmida



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Diet

Eels are opportunistic, carnivorous feeders. Their natural diet consists of insects, fish, yabbies, shrimps, frogs, and waterfowl, including ducklings and cygnets.

The natural feeding behaviours of predators such as eels may be distressing to witness, however, their role as a predator helps manage ecosystem health.

Lifecycle

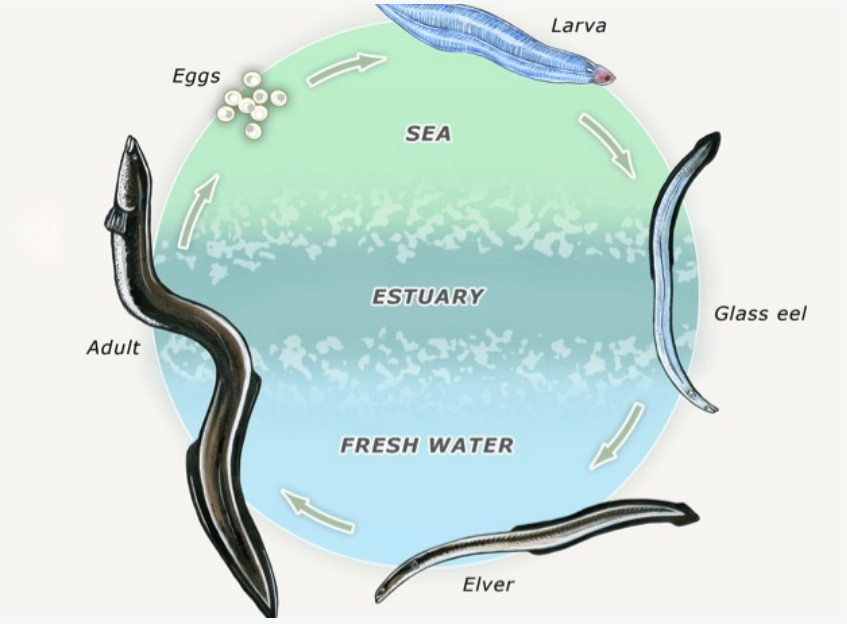
Eels are catadromous, meaning that they live in freshwater but migrate to the ocean to breed. Eels migrate from the East Coast of Australia to the Coral Sea to spawn. Scientists believe that eels only spawn once in their lifetime, after which they die.

Eel larvae are carried back to the continental shelf by ocean currents, where they then metamorphise into transparent and undeveloped 'Glass Eels.'

Glass Eels are carried by tides and currents to shore and into coastal estuaries, where they continue their development into 'elvers.'

Elvers migrate upstream to inhabit all estuarine and river environments and mature into adult eels.

The adult Longfin Eel ranges from 60cm - 150cm with an olive-green to grey-brown upper body, and the adult Shortfin Eel ranges from 50cm - 90cm with a dark chocolate-brown or grey-brown upper body.



Life cycle of freshwater eels - Science Learning Hub
Image: ©Bruce Mahalski 2014

How do eels get into an isolated wetland?

During high rainfall or flood events, populations of eels are further dispersed into off-river storages such as dams and ponds. This is assisted by their ability to move overland in damp conditions, via slithering movements.

What is Council doing?

Native eels have high ecological importance as a predator in their ecosystem. For this reason, Council does not remove eels from local waterbodies.

For more information please contact Counci's Environment Team on (02) 4221 6111 or email sustainability@shellharbour.nsw.gov.au

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