

Description of a new species of weasel shark, *Hemigaleus australiensis* n. sp. (Carcharhiniformes: Hemigaleidae) from Australian waters

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Abstract

A new species of weasel shark from the genus *Hemigaleus* Bleeker, 1852 (Carcharhiniformes: Hemigaleidae) is described from northern Australia. *Hemigaleus australiensis* n. sp. is known from the insular and continental shelves of northern Australia from inshore bays to depths of 170 m. The new species differs from the only other member of this genus, *Hemigaleus microstoma*, in having substantially lower vertebral counts, much higher tooth counts in lower jaw, and a black-tipped second dorsal fin. *Hemigaleus australiensis* and *H. microstoma* are also readily separated by differences in morphometrics and sizes at birth and maturity.

Key words: *Hemigaleus australiensis*, Hemigaleidae, weasel shark, northern Australia

Introduction

The genus *Hemigaleus*, proposed by Bleeker (1852) for *Hemigaleus microstoma* from Java, presently consists of only one described species. *Hemigaleus microstoma* is widely distributed in the Indo-West Pacific from southern India and Sri Lanka in the west, to Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia (Java), Taiwan, China and the Philippines in the east (Compagno, 1984, 1988, 1998). This species was also previously documented as occurring widely across northern Australia (Compagno, 1984), and off Papua New Guinea (Last and Stevens, 1994). Stevens and Cuthbert (1983) documented substantial differences in tooth and vertebral counts between Australian specimens and material from Singapore,