

Longfin eel / tuna ōrea

Anguilla dieffenbachii

Native

At risk - Declining

The longfin eel is a native, endemic species classified as 'declining'. Its distribution is widespread including streams some 280 kilometres inland in the Waikato. They are skilful climbers, especially when small (<120 millimetres) and can negotiate very steep waterfalls.

Longfin eels are relatively long-lived animals (100+ years) that can only reproduce once. Like many other New Zealand native fish, longfin eels require access to both freshwater and marine environments at some stage in their lives. Their spawning grounds are unknown but are thought to be somewhere near Tonga. Before migrating, the shape and physiology of the longfins change: their heads become less dome like in shape and their eyes enlarge.

The most distinctive feature is the difference in origin between the top (dorsal) and bottom (anal) fins. On the shortfin, the difference in origin is small (both originating halfway along the eel) whereas on the longfin, the dorsal fin begins two-thirds of the way along the back (see photo).

Longfin eels are highly valued culturally and by Maori. Longfin eels are less abundant than the shortfin eel, and it is appreciated if any longfins caught are returned to the stream.

