Striped red mullet

*Mullus surmuletus*

There are two species of red mullet available in the UK. They are part of the Mullidae family and can also be referred to as goatfish (1). The most common is *Mullus surmuletus* or striped red mullet. It is unclear whether *Mullus barbatus* (plain red mullet) also occurs in northern European waters.

**Biology**

Striped red mullet is a demersal, benthic schooling species. It inhabits muddy or sandy seabeds in depths from below the low water mark to around 100 metres. Its growth rate is relatively rapid and during the first two years similar for the two sexes. Then the female grows faster than the males and by five years are on average about 6 cm longer. The average length is 25 cm but it can attain a length of 45 cm. The maximum reported age is 10 years. Reproduction takes place from May to July. Striped red mullet feed primarily on crustaceans and molluscs (2, 3).

**Fisheries and gears**

Striped red mullet has been an important by-catch species for many years. A high market price has made it a target species for French vessels in the English Channel and southern North Sea, where it is mainly caught by bottom trawlers generally using a mesh size of 70–99 mm. In the Eastern English Channel, Western English Channel and south of the North Sea it is taken a by-catch in mixed trawl fisheries.

**Distribution**

Striped red mullet is found in the Eastern Atlantic: Western Norway, English Channel (rare in North Sea) to Dakar, Senegal and the Canary Islands, including the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

**Red mullet catches**

The main European country catching striped red mullet in European waters is France. Landings in the 1990s averaged 2500 t pa, which increased to 5000 t pa in the 2000s. The UK catch in 2009 was 392 t. Other important countries are Netherlands and the UK for the North Sea and English Channel, and France and Spain for the Bay of Biscay.
Stock status
In 2010 European information on striped red mullet was brought together under a new ICES working group (WGNEW) (2). In June 2013 ICES provided advice on striped red mullet in subarea IV (North Sea) and divisions VIIId (Eastern English Channel) and Illa (Skagerrak–Kattegat). The stock is mainly fished in the E English Channel where biomass estimates show high variability and a considerable decrease in the last three years, and southern North Sea where abundance has been low in recent years (3). The October 2012 advice for striped red mullet in subareas and divisions VI, VIIa–c, e–k, VIII, and IXa (Western area) is biennial. The landings have shown an increase since the mid-1990s and they are now stable and above average (essentially in subarea VIII). Recruitment indices fluctuate without trend although there is some indication of several large year classes in the early 2000s (4).

Given the species’ warm-water affinities there is also some evidence that the very marked increases in landings in recent years might be partly explained by increased abundance in the more northerly parts of its distribution range. Its relatively fast growth rate and a planktonic egg life-phase which may make it more capable to rapidly respond to climate warming by colonising new habitats (5).

Management and conservation
In Europe there are no management measures on striped red mullet so there are no limits on catches or minimum sizes in force. However, most of the fisheries in which they are caught are managed, and this is likely to indirectly constrain catches. With the highly variable recruitment, it is difficult to define a sustainable yield. Efforts are being made to improve data collection (2).

Product Characteristics
Striped red mullet is classified as a round white fish. As the name suggests they have a red coloured skin with pale pink flesh. *M. surmuletus* has thin yellow bands or stripes running along its body, the *M. barbatus*, an attractive mottled skin. The blunt snout and the two sensory organs (barbells) are distinctive. It has a rich flavour which is attributed to its shellfish diet. It is usually sold whole and can be fresh or frozen. It can be steamed, fried, boiled, grilled and baked.

Supply chain standards
There are supply chain standards from capture to retailer:

- **Seafood Responsible Fishing Scheme.** Sets best practice standards for fishing vessels: (BSi: PAS 72:2006) and **British Retail Consortium (BRC) Global Standard/Safe and Local Supplier Approval (SALSA)** certification to raise standards in the seafood processing and wholesaling sectors.

For further information contact:
Bill Lart: T 01472 252323 E: w_lart@seafish.co.uk
Karen Green E: k_green@seafish.co.uk

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3. [http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2013/2013/mur-347d.pdf](http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2013/2013/mur-347d.pdf)
4. [http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2012/2012/mut-west.pdf](http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2012/2012/mut-west.pdf)