



A green sawfish with its rostrum illegally amputated. Picture: Murdoch University

Harsh sawfish penalty call

■ Glenn Cordingley

A leading scientist wants people who amputate sawfish rostrums treated with the same severity as those poaching body parts from other endangered species, like rhinos.

Murdoch University researcher David Morgan said sawfish protection needed better enforcement.

He said available evidence suggested sawfish died a lingering death after rostrum removal.

The rostrum — the saw-shaped extension that gives the fish its name — is used to sense, forage for and capture crustaceans and small fish.

Sawfish forage on the riverbed and sense prey via the electrosensitive pores on their rostra.

They use the jagged edged protrusion to stun or impale their food and protect themselves from predators.

Dr Morgan and his team studied the behaviour of a green sawfish found in the North West's Ashburton River after its rostrum had been illegally amputated.

They observed changes in movement patterns and habitat use compared to similarly sized sawfish with

rostra intact. "We found that it ranged more widely, perhaps in order to source easy prey or avoid attacks by predators, than other tagged sawfish of a similar size with rostra intact," he said.

After 75 days, the fish was no longer detected and may either have emigrated outside the detection range or more likely, perished because emigration occurred infrequently for other tagged sawfish of that size.

Dr Morgan also captured and tagged a freshwater sawfish with a partially severed rostrum contained in a freshwater pool in the Fitzroy River.

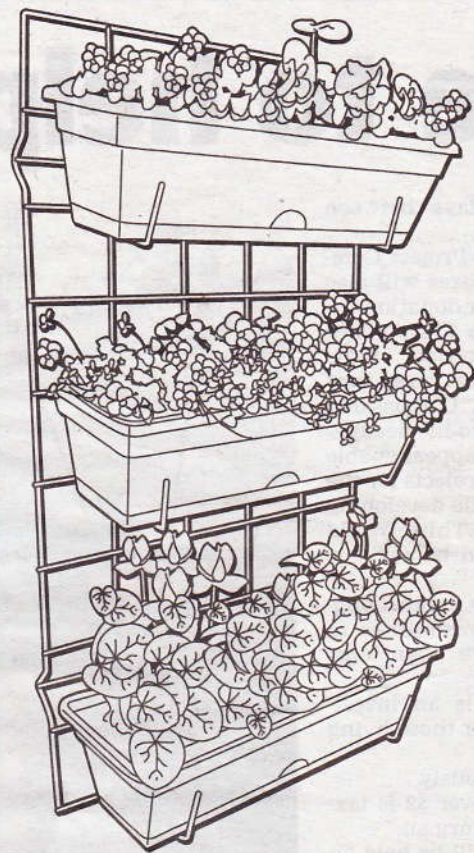
He said its damaged rostrum had affected its ability to forage.

"It was detected by our loggers for 10 days and not thereafter," he said.

"In comparison, two other similarly sized individuals tagged in the same pool at the same time were detected for several months.

"This supports our assumption that the injured sawfish died in the pool."

Dr Morgan said the decline of sawfish was exacerbated by humans removing their rostra.



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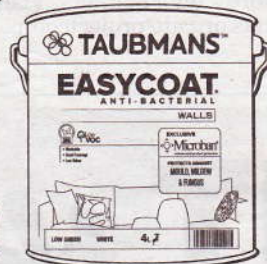


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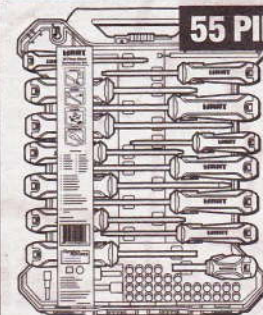


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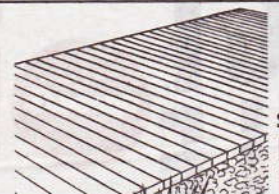
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