

Fish-families-fishermen

Mystic Seaport Museum - Mystery fish is a crocodile longtom



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Mystery fish is a crocodile longtom

Richard Story, Aitutaki-based fisheries officer at the Ministry of Marine Resources, contacted Cook Islands News yesterday with the information and said though the fish was common on the eastern coast of Rarotonga, it was not known for often coming into shore like the one caught. They are a common schooling fish at the drop-off, mainly on the east side of Rarotonga. Crocodile longtom can grow to about 80 centimetres in length and is one variety in the large longtom family, which is closely related to the houndfish, garfish and flying fish families.

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The fish in question was caught at Avana with raw chicken thrown off a wharf. As for the one caught off Avana, Ralph said he threw it back, as he does with all his fish, only for it to be eaten by another fish soon after it hit the water.

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The fisherman, Wayne Ralph, said the fish was about 60 centimetres in length. They do sometimes come into the harbour at Avarua because it is close to the sea, but they are not a lagoon fish. Fishermen in Australia say that at night, a light on the water attracts schooling longtom so much that they leap at it.

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He said the fish went by a number of Maori names, including kaku and papa at Rarotonga. The case of the mean-looking Avana mystery fish has been solved, with the unknown species being identified as a suitably-named crocodile longtom. Islander anecdotes tell of them leaping into lighted canoes with such force that their bills became embedded in the woodwork.

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Proof perhaps, that it is a fish eat fish world after all.

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Theyre very common on the outer reef, a lot of the fly fishing people catch them when theyre out there, Story said.

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