



# Capital Letters

Detailed protocols underpin the Fish Names and the Aquatic Plant Names Standards, some of which relate to grammar and style. For example, there are rules for the use of hyphens and the structure of word endings such as “stripe” vs “striped”.

Some of the rules relate to the use of capital letters, particularly with respect to using capital letters at the start of each word, and using ALL CAPS for group names. These two uses are explained below.

## Why do standard names start with capital letters?

One of the rules in the Fish Names Standard protocols is to use capital letters at the start of each word except directly following a hyphen (exceptions to this are where the hyphenated word/s are proper nouns, e.g. North-West Hardyhead).

The decision to use capital letters in this manner for fish and seafood names was discussed and endorsed by a 2004 workshop of a broad range of stakeholders who met in Adelaide to produce the first list of standard names of Australian fishes. This Fish Names Expert Group included representatives of/for commercial fishers, recreational anglers, seafood importers, seafood retailers, government fisheries and research departments, fish book authors, aquaria managers and fish taxonomists.

There are two compelling arguments for using capital letters and thereby considering the names as proper nouns.

### *Distinguishing adjectives from names*

The use of capital letters for standard names clearly distinguishes the name from an adjective used to describe the fish. For example, *Eubalichthys bucephalus* has the standard name, “Black Reef Leatherjacket”.

Without capital letters, the statement, “that fish is a black reef leatherjacket” is ambiguous. Is it a species called the black reef leatherjacket or is it a reef leatherjacket that happens to be black? The use of capitals removes ambiguity: “that fish is a Black Reef Leatherjacket.” Similarly, without capitals, native oyster would be an oyster that is native, but with capitals as Native Oyster, it is the standard name of *Ostrea angasi*. There is far more information and clarity in pelagic Swordfish and Pelagic Stingray than there is in pelagic swordfish and pelagic stingray; the two standard names here are Swordfish and Pelagic Stingray.

While this use of capital letters removes significant ambiguity, there will always be a few exceptions to the rule. For example, some publications will choose to capitalise adjectives such as Eastern. Reference to the Eastern stock of Gemfish would therefore be Eastern Gemfish when the Standard Name is simply Gemfish. This contrasts with a standard name that includes Eastern such as Eastern Hulafish.

### *Emphasising biological entities*

The use of capital letters for standard names that relate to individual species gives prominence to each distinct biological entity. Capitals make the names easier to spot in publications such as field guides and fisheries reports, and highlight their importance as proxies for scientific names.



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### Why are group standard names displayed in all capital letters?

The Standard includes two broad categories of names: individual species names and group names. Group names cover two or more species, and provide flexibility for users to group species together for sale, or to group data for more than one species.

For example, about ten Chimaeras and Ghostsharks are found in Australian waters and some are marketed. The products are somewhat uncommon and the species are rarely distinguished from one another, so the group name GHOSTSHARKS is available to cover all these species (i.e., all members of the family Chimaeridae). Group names are written in all capitals as a visual aid to easily distinguish them from individual species names.

As of early 2025, the Fish Names Committee is considering removing the plural endings of group names and inviting users to add the plural ending if desired. If this change is adopted, the standard name GHOSTSHARKS will become GHOSTSHARK, and KING SNAPPERS will become KING SNAPPER, etc.

### The Standard

The FRDC Fish Names Committee (FNC) is responsible for the maintenance and ongoing development of the Australian Fish Names Standard (AS 5300), which is accessible at

**[www.frdc.com.au/knowledge-hub/standards/australian-fish-names-standard](http://www.frdc.com.au/knowledge-hub/standards/australian-fish-names-standard)**

Use of the names is strongly encouraged but not currently mandatory apart from export regulations (see [www.legislation.gov.au/F2005L02705/latest/text](http://www.legislation.gov.au/F2005L02705/latest/text)). This is one of a series of Fact Files to help explain the background to some of Australia's fish names and the Fish Name Committee's application of the Standard's naming protocols.

### FRDC Fish Names Standard