



ATULAI (bigeye scad) *Selar crumenophthalmus*

The bigeye scad or atulai, as it is called in Chamorro, is an important food fish found in all tropical seas. It is in the same family as the jacks. The combination of large eyes and compressed body help distinguish it from other mackerel-like scads. The scutes (a lateral row of bony-ridged scales forming a keel at the base of the tail) distinguish it from similar-looking small mackerels of the tuna family.

Atulai spend most of their time in deep, near shore waters beyond the edge of the reef. During certain times of the year, they migrate to shallow bays and channels where they form large schools or groups. When inshore, they feed on small benthic (bottom-dwelling) invertebrates, foraminifera (tiny, pinhead shells found in deep water), and shrimp. Offshore, they feed on zooplankton and fish larvae (eggs).

Atulai can reach a size of 15 inches (38 cm), but rarely are more than 10 inches (25 cm) in Guam's waters. During the day, atulai can be harvested by nets and hook and line. The same methods can be used at night when fishing in or close to a lighted area.

During atulai season, it is not unusual to see a large crowd of anglers fishing for atulai in or around the Agana Boat Basin area. Chamorros call this "tiempon atulai" or atulai harvest time. Sometimes, a large net is set across an entire bay to trap the atulai. A large group of people help close the net and harvest the fish; several thousand pounds can be harvested this way.

This popular food fish may move between islands or island groups as they are not always present near Guam. Little is known of these offshore movements. While there is no consistent season for harvesting atulai, the best months for atulai fishing appear to be from August to November.