

Giant bully

Gobiomorphus gobioides

OTHER NAMES:

Titarakura, Tipokopoko

THREAT RANKING

At Risk: Naturally uncommon

Sharing Pastoral Streams with Native Fish

New Zealand's long isolation has created a unique freshwater fish fauna with many species found nowhere else on earth. Our freshwater fish are taonga (treasures), and some species play an important role as mahinga kai, holding significant cultural, ecological and environmental value. In our streams, native fish rely on healthy, connected habitats that extend from shaded headwaters through to lowland waterways. This is important not only for species that live within pastoral environments, but also for those that need a clear pathway between freshwater and the sea to complete their life cycles. Farm waterways are a key part of this network, providing habitat for spawning, feeding and growth, as well as the connections between these areas. Understanding which fish live in your waterways is a rewarding first step toward sharing these spaces and supporting healthy, thriving fish communities.

Giant bullies are the largest bully species in New Zealand, with some individuals reaching up to 250 mm in length!

Giant bullies are one of New Zealand's migratory bully species. Their large size makes them less susceptible to predators compared to smaller bully species.

They are easy to recognise due to their large size. However, juvenile

giant bullies can be confused with common bullies but can be distinguished by the number of spines on the first dorsal (back) fin. Giant bullies have six spines, whereas common bullies have seven or eight.



Figure 1: Giant bully.



Lifecycle of the giant bully

Giant bullies are thought to be diadromous, meaning they likely migrate to sea as part of their lifecycle, although little is currently known about their reproduction and early life stages. Individuals smaller than 80 mm are rarely recorded.

They are primarily a coastal species and are not often found more than 10 km inland or at high elevations, suggesting they remain close to the sea and may spend time in estuarine or brackish environments.



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Where do giant bullies live?

Giant bullies are endemic to New Zealand and are widespread throughout most of the country, occurring in rivers and streams across both the North and South Islands, as well as Stewart Island (Figure 2).

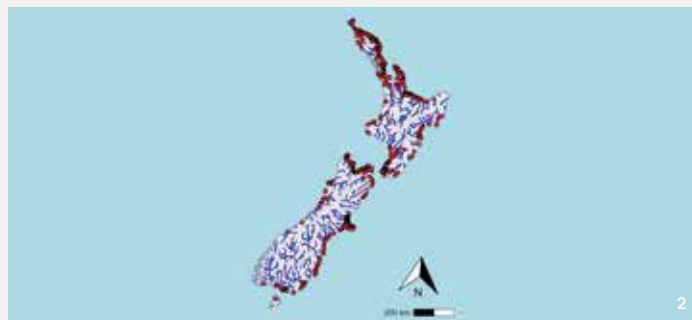


Figure 2: National distribution of the giant bully. Data represent records held in the New Zealand Freshwater Fish Database (NZFFDB) April 2026.

What giant bullies need in streams

Giant bullies prefer slow flowing coastal habitats, where they rely on instream structure for shelter. They are commonly found in areas with overhanging cover and spend much of the day close to the streambed, hiding before becoming active at night.

They rely on instream features such as large rocks, logs, and overhanging vegetation to provide refuge. These habitats offer protection from predators and create suitable conditions for feeding and rearing.

Giant bullies are nocturnal and feed at night. They are thought to feed on small fish and invertebrates.



Photo credits: Robert McDowall, Fern Kumeroa, Cindy Baker, DairyNZ

» Actions you can take to make your local stream a better place for giant bullies

- Fence streams to exclude stock and reduce bank erosion and damage to streambeds.
- Plant and maintain native riparian vegetation to provide shade and keep stream temperatures cool. Riparian planting also stabilises banks, adds habitat complexity (such as roots and woody debris), and supplies organic matter. Shading can also reduce nuisance weed growth and the need for mechanical channel maintenance, which can disturb benthic habitats used by bullies.
- Retain logs, boulders and undercut banks as these provide important refuges for giant bullies.
- Improve fish passage at instream structures such as culverts, weirs and floodgates. Ensure structures are correctly sized and installed so they do not create drops, barriers, excessive water velocities or scouring that restrict giant bully movements.

Refer to regional DairyNZ guidance & NZ Fish Passage Guidelines for more information