South African Abalone (Haliotis midae)

Family
HALIOTIDAE

NEMBA Status
Protected

CITES Listing
Appendix III

Geographic location / distribution
Cape Columbine on the west coast of South Africa to Port St Johns (Transkei)

Physical characteristics

General description - a sea snail found in shallow coastal waters

Size: maximum shell length: 230mm
Weight/Mass: up to 3kg in the shell

Note: This is the largest species of Abalone in South Africa

Minimum legal size (MLS) - 114 mm shell breadth (138 mm shell length) has been set to allow abalone a chance to breed for one or two years before being eligible for harvest (Tarr, 1995).

MLRA: Commercial fishery indefinitely suspended; trade in abalone products still legal if from legitimate sources.

Identification of H. midae: From the above descriptions and data the following principles can be used to clearly establish whether or not a given sample consists of Haliotis midae:

In the shell, the shell length is greater than 90mm for most of the specimens = H. midae.
Out of the shell, the flesh mass is greater than 90grams for most of the specimens = H. midae.
For smaller specimens, or to provide additional confirmation of the above identification, the general descriptions of the animals (in particular the characteristics of the fringe), and the photographic illustrations can be used.

Traded parts, derivatives and products

Abalone is traded in live, frozen, canned and dried forms
The majority of illegal trade is in dried and frozen abalone, although there are recorded incidents of illegal trade in canned abalone. There are no recorded incidents of illegal trade in live abalone
Known trade routes for illegally harvested abalone include Mozambique, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Namibia.
There are numerous known concealment measures—these include black plastic bags, sealed buckets, plastic containers and concealment in cardboard boxes between other fish products.
**Halictis midae**—Perlemoen or South African Abalone

- **Fringe**—Muscular foot has a dense fringe of fleshy projections on margins; foot often green when wet. Fringe is beard-like and corallines branched, densely packed projections interspersed with occasional longer unbranched tentacles.

- **Shell**—Large, heavy, flattened shell with strong irregular corrugations running across the spire (parallel to growing edge); juveniles lack the corrugations.

- **Total mass**—Up to 3 kg in the shell.

- **Shell colour**—Ranges from white (usually in the Western Cape) to dark red (usually in the Eastern Cape).

- **Larger abalone** have strong wave-like corrugations parallel to the growing edge of the shell. Very large abalone often have smoother shells because the corrugations have worn off.

- **Live Halictis midae**—Front view of whole animal.
**Haliotis midae - WET and DRY comparison**

**WET Abalone**
(usually frozen for transport)

**DRIED Abalone**

**Haliotis midae - DRIED**

Top view of shucked and dried abalone - cigarette (8 cm) for scale. The round structure (X) is the shell muscle.

Underside (foot) of the same dried abalone.

**Comparison of H. spadicea (left) and H. midae (right)**

*H. spadicea* - Underside and top view of shell. Size: Max. 9.5cm

*H. midae* - Underside and top view of shell. Size: max. 20cm

Comparison of fresh, shucked *H. spadicea* (left) and *H. midae* (right). Illegal harvesters often claim their catch is *H. spadicea* to avoid prosecution.
Illegally harvested abalone confiscated by law enforcers. **Photographer:** Jacques du Toit
Illegally harvested Abalone drying on racks. **Copyright/Website:** SARS

Illegally harvested abalone confiscated by law enforcers. **Copyright/Website:** South African Police Force (SAPS)
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