SHORT COMMUNICATION

First report of *Awaous ocellaris* in goby fry or "ipon" fishery in Northern Luzon, Philippines

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Goby fry found in Northern Luzon, commonly called "ipon", is an important fishery in the Philippines that is threatened by increasing demand and exploitation of the resource. The continuing decline of the "ipon" population calls for effective fisheries management and conservation. Unfortunately, effective management efforts are hindered by the unresolved identities of the goby fry species which comprise "ipon." Here, we provide the first report of *Awaous ocellaris* as one of the species included in the "ipon" fishery in Aparri, Cagayan, We used the mitochondrial gene cytochrome c oxidase subunit 1 (CO1), that is used by the International Barcode of Life (IBOL) as a standard taxonomic DNA marker for vertebrate species. The results provide important information on the identity of "ipon" which is vital to ensuring the sustainability of the resource.

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INTRODUCTION

Goby fry are greatly valued food fish in the Pacific, the Caribbean, Central America, and the Indian Ocean. In the Philippines, goby fry, which are commonly called "ipon" in Northern Luzon, are often exploited for fermentation and are known to be used as primary ingredient for the most expensive fish pastes in the country (Ruddle 1993, Bell 1999). They are mostly found in Northern Luzon (BFAR 1939), but sightings have been recorded in some places in Southern Mindanao. These species are catadromous, descending to sea for spawning, and then returning upstream to freshwater habitats during a precisely limited season (Ruddle 1993).

In the early 1930s, there were already impressive yields of "ipon" in Northern Luzon. Unfortunately, the increased demand for these post-larvae gobies through the years has encouraged the development of various capture methods to increase the yields, thereby subjecting the resource to overfishing (Bell 1999). Despite management and conservation efforts, such as the Fisheries Administrative Order No. 9 s. 1939 entitled "Regulations for the conservation of certain species of fish commonly called "Ipon" in the northern province of Luzon" (BFAR 1939), the current status of "ipon" fisheries is dire. In view of this, proper management of the "ipon" resource is