Small or medium-sized fishes, usually less than 40 cm in length, with usually deep, compressed bodies encased in a tough armour of minute to moderate rough scales. Mouth small, terminal, teeth not fused together. First (spinous) dorsal fin reduced to 1 to 3 spines, the first often capable of being locked by the second. Pelvic fins absent or fused into a single rudimentary spine or shield-like plate. Gill opening a small slit in front of pectoral fin base.

Colour: very variable, often with strikingly marked and vivid patterns.

SIMILAR FAMILIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

Triodontidae, Tetraodontidae, Diodontidae, Molidae: have jaw teeth fused together into a single or pair of beak-like plates.

Triacanthodidae, Triacanthidae: pelvic fins always present (a long spine, sometimes with a soft ray).

Ostraciodontidae: body encased in a box-like armour and no spinous dorsal fin.
FAO Sheets

BALISTIDAE

Key to Genera

1 a. No fleshy barbel on lower jaw.

2 a. Scales small or moderate but in regular rows; all soft fin rays branched (subfamily Balistinae)

3 a. Caudal peduncle deeper than wide (compressed) ...................... Balistes (including the genera Metichthys, Balistoides, Sufflamen, Odonus and Canthidermis - revision needed)

3 b. Caudal peduncle round in cross-section ...................... Abalistes

2 b. Scales small or minute, not in regular rows; all soft fin rays unbranched (subfamily Monacanthinae)

4 a. First dorsal fin spine erectile, locked by second spine (Fig. 1)

5 a. Plate-like pelvic fin spine present; anal fin with less than 40 fin rays

6 a. Mouth terminal, snout not elongated (Fig. 2)

...................... Monacanthus

6 b. Mouth dorsal, snout elongated (Fig. 3) Oxymonacanthus

5 b. Bony pelvic plate or spine absent or nearly so; anal fin with more than 40 fin rays

7 a. Dorsal fin spine over eye centre (Fig. 4) Alutera

7 b. Dorsal fin spine on snout, in front of eye (Fig. 5) Pseudaleterus

4 b. First dorsal fin spine not erectile; strong curved spines on caudal peduncle (Fig. 6) Paratutarius

1 b. Barbel on chin, snout pointed, mouth dorsal (Fig. 7); dorsal fin spine very feeble .... Psilocephalus

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Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7
List of Species occurring in the Area
(Code numbers are given for those species for which Identification Sheets are included)

Abalistes stellaris  BALI Abal 1  Monacanthus chinensis
         2       Monacanthus cheirocephalus
         3       Monacanthus cryptodon
Alutera monoceros  BALI Alut 1  Monocanthus curtorhynchus
         1       Monocanthus hajam
         2       Monocanthus macrurus
         3       Monocanthus melancephalus
Alutera scripta
Balistes aculeatus  Monocanthus nematophorus
         1       Monocanthus nemurus
         2       Monocanthus nigrolineatus
Balistes brevissimus  Monocanthus nitens
         1       Monocanthus sandwichiensis
Balistes chrysopterus  Monocanthus scopas
Balistes conspicillum  Monocanthus septemclassiensis
Balistes erythrodon  Monocanthus spinosissimus
Balistes flavimarginatus
Balistes fraenatus  Monocanthus sulcatus
Balistes fuscus  Monocanthus tormentosus
Balistes garnoti
Balistes jacksonianus
Balistes radula  Oxy_monacanthus longirostris
Balistes rectangulus
Balistes rotundatus
Balistes ringens  Pseudatutes nasicornis
Balistes undulatus
Balistes verrucosa  Paralutarius prionurus
Balistes vetula
Balistes vidua
Balistes viridescens
Balistes wittensis  Psilocephalus barbatus
FAMILY: Balistidae

Abalistes stellatus (Bloch & Schneider, 1801)

FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FAMILY: Balistidae

FISHING AREAS 57,71
(E Ind. Ocean)
(W Cent. Pacific)

Abalistes stellatus (Bloch & Schneider, 1868)

VERNACULAR NAMES:

FAO: En - Starry triggerfish
Fr -
Sp -

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS:

Body deep and compressed, with leathery armour of scales in regular rotes. A small groove in front of eye; cheek covered with scales and some enlarged scales behind gill opening. Mouth small, teeth not fused to form a beak. First dorsal fin with 3 stout spines, the first being locked erect by the second; soft dorsal and anal fin rays branched; upper and lower lobes of caudal fin filamentous in large adults; caudal peduncle almost round in cross-section (sometimes depressed, its width greater than its depth).

Colour: grey dashed with olive green; three large white blotches on back and numerous small blue spots; belly white; 3 to 4 yellow lines from mouth to pectoral fin base. Pectoral fins yellow with a dark base; other fins banded with black, yellow and olive.
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS OF SIMILAR SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

*Balistes* species (*sensu lato*): caudal peduncle laterally compressed (oval in cross-section; almost round or wider than deep in *B. stellaris*).

Other balistid species: scales irregularly placed on body and soft fin rays not branched; also, a chin barbel present in *Psilocephalus*.

SIZE:

Maximum: 60 cm; common: 30 to 40 cm.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND BEHAVIOUR:

Throughout northern part of area and southward to northern coasts of Australia; also, westward to East Africa and northward to Japan.

Shallow waters down to 90 m.

Feeds on bottom fauna.

PRESENT FISHING GROUNDS:

Throughout its range.

CATCHES, MAIN FISHING GEAR AND PRINCIPAL FORMS OF UTILIZATION:

Separate statistics are not reported for this species.

Caught mainly with bottom trawls.

Marketed fresh; flesh resembles chicken.
FAMILY: BALISTIDAE

SYNONYMS STILL IN USE: Aluteres monoceros: misspelling

VERNACULAR NAMES:

FAO:  En - Unicorn filefish
Fr -
Sp -

NATIONAL:

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS:

Body deep and compressed, with Leathery armour of small irregular scales. Mouth small, teeth not fused into a beak. First dorsal fin above eye centre, a single spine visible., the second spine (minute) hidden; soft dorsal and anal fin rays not branched, 46 to 50 and 47 to 52 fin rays respectively; pelvic fins merely a flap of skin, but no bony plate or shield; caudal fin much shorter than snout.

Colour: uniform light grey, with scattering of dark brown dots on back; fins yellow.
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS OF SIMILAR SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

Alutera scripta: caudal fin longer (longer than snout; shorter than snout in A. moroceros).

Balistes (sensu lato) and Abalistes species: regular scale rows on body and a second dorsal fin spine evident.

Other balistid species: fewer dorsal and anal fin rays (46 to 50 and 47 to 52 in A. monoceros).

SIZE:

Maximum: 50 cm; common: 30 to 40 cm.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND BEHAVIOUR:

Throughout northern part of area, but not to Australian coasts; also, westward to East Africa and northward to South China Sea.

Coastal waters down to 50 m.

Feeds on small animals.

PRESENT FISHING GROUNDS:

Coastal waters.

CATCHES, MAIN FISHING GEAR AND PRINCIPAL FORMS OF UTILIZATION:

Separate statistics are not reported for this species.

Caught mainly with trap nets and bottom trawls.

Marketed fresh; highly valued as food.