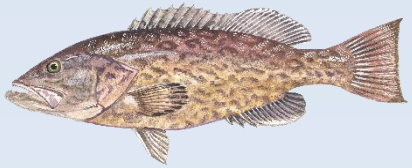
Gag Grouper Overview

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

October 2021

Gag Grouper Current Regulations and Management History



- **Current ACL:** 734,350 lbs gw (95% of ABC)
  - Regulatory Amendment 22 (2015)

- **Sector Allocations**: 49% recreational, 51% commercial
  - Amendment 16 (2009)

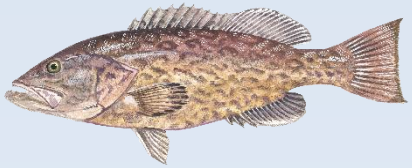
- **Season (commercial and recreational):** May 1- December 31
  - Spawning season closure through Amendment 16 (2009)

- **Recreational Bag Limit:** 1 fish/person/day with the 3-grouper aggregate
  - Regulatory Amendment 22 (2015)

- **Commercial Trip Limit:** 1,000 lbs (gutted weight) until 75% of the annual catch limit is met or projected to be met. Then the trip limit is 500 lbs gutted weight (590 lbs whole weight)
  - Amendment 16 (2009)

- **Size Limit (commercial and recreational):** 24in total length
  - Amendment 9 (1999)

SEDAR 71



- Stock Status: Overfished and experiencing overfishing
  - Terminal Year: 2019
  - Gag Fishery Overview

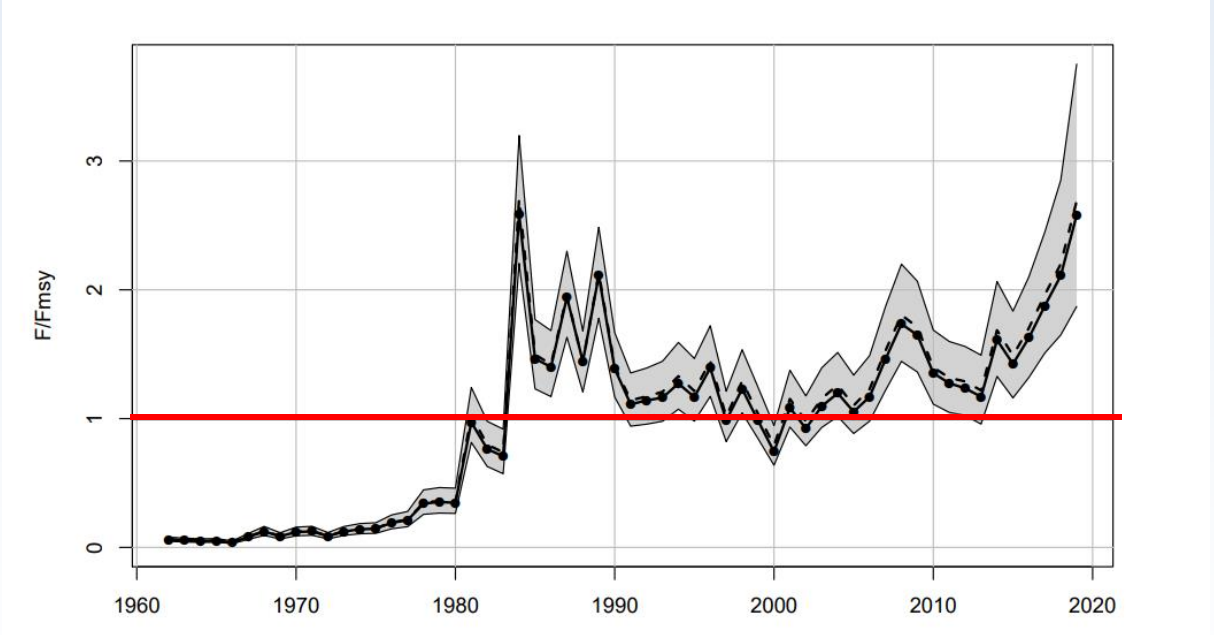
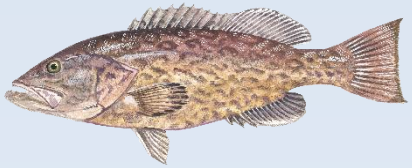


Figure 33. Estimated time series relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; dashed lines represent median values; gray error bands indicate 5^{th} and 95^{th} percentiles of the MCBE trials. Top panel: spawning biomass relative to the minimum stock size threshold, $\mathrm{MSST} = 0.75\mathrm{SSB}_{\mathrm{MSY}}$.

SEDAR 71



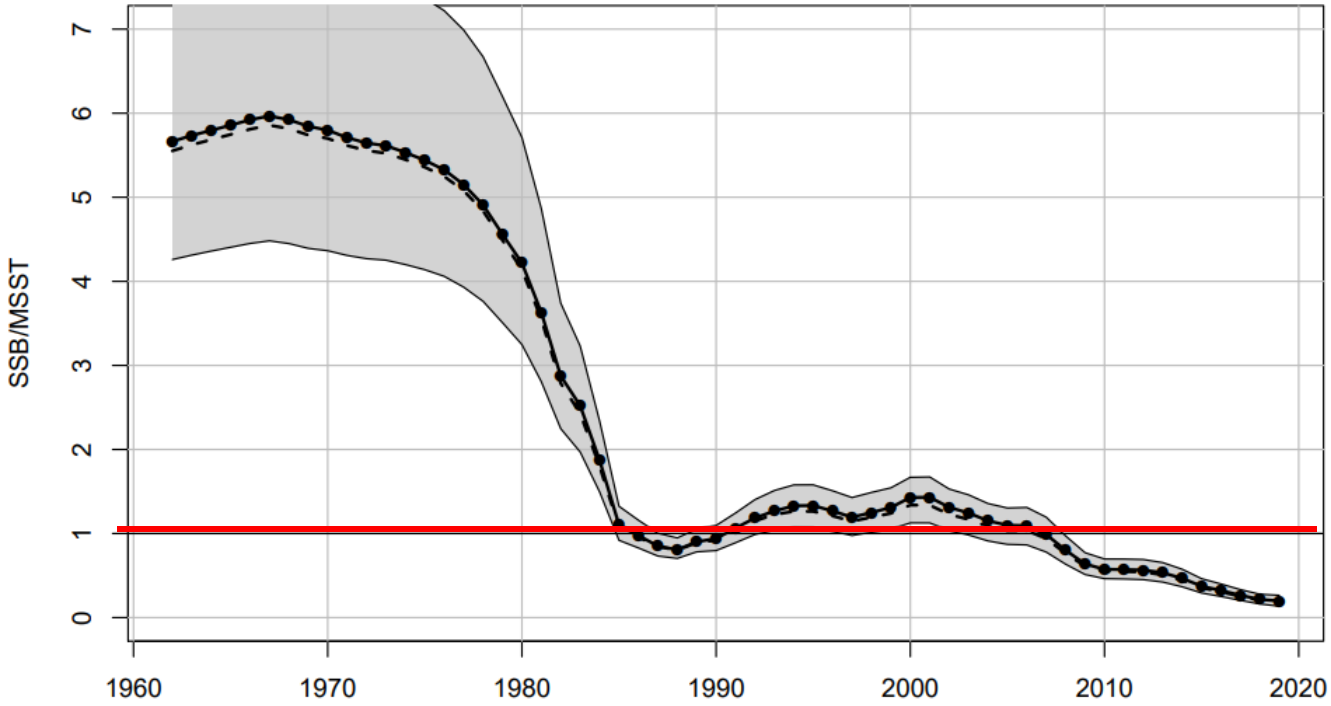


Figure 33. Estimated time series relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; dashed lines represent median values; gray error bands indicate 5^{th} and 95^{th} percentiles of the MCBE trials. Bottom panel: F relative to F_{MSY}.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
"To Conserve and Manage"

SEDAR 71

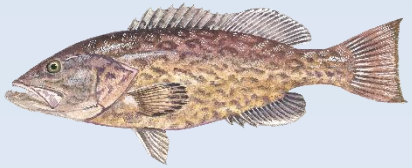
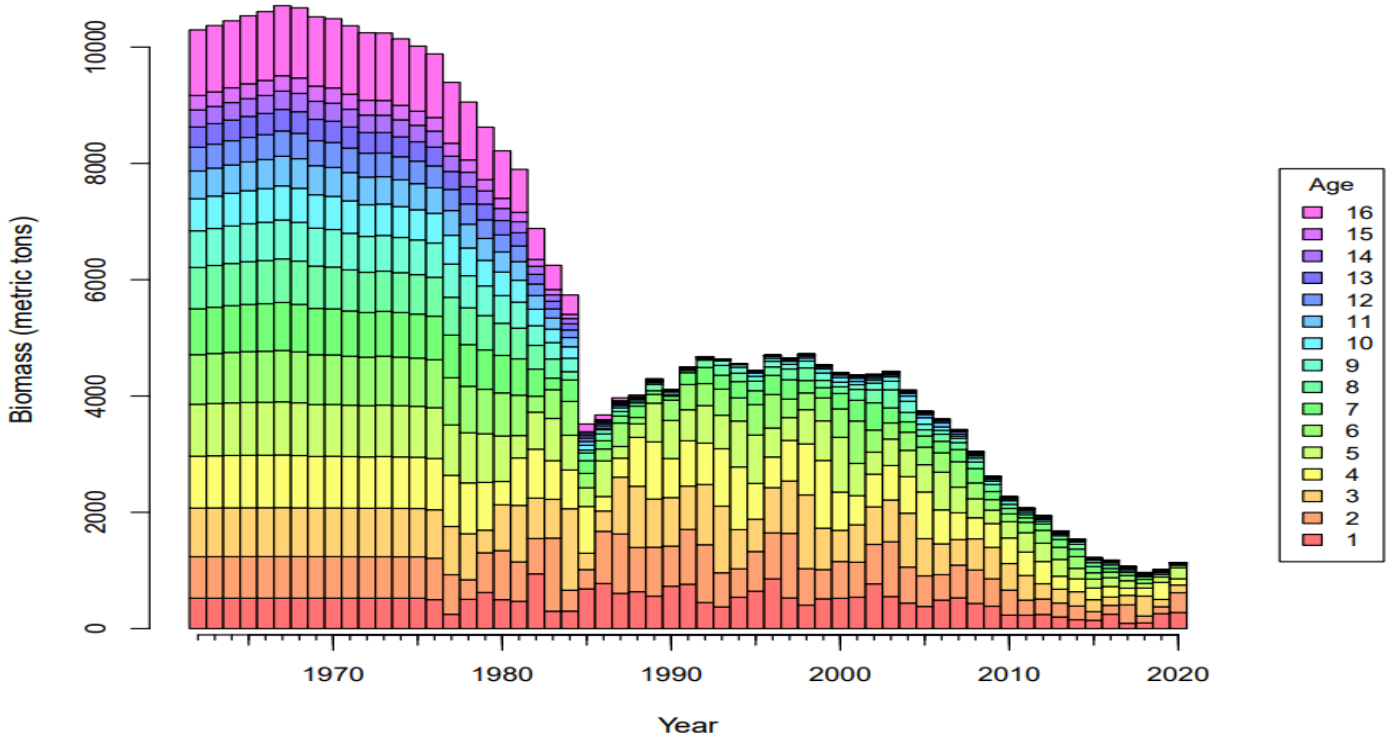
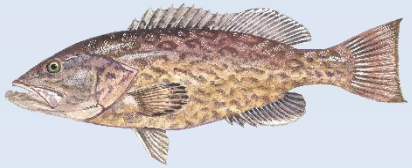


Figure 15. Estimated biomass at age at start of year.



Rebuilding Timeframe



- Gag does not currently have a rebuilding plan
- If F=0, the stock could rebuild in 7 years, therefore the maximum timeframe for rebuilding is 10 years
  - To account for this timeframe and dead discards, substantial reductions to allowable harvest are needed
- The Council requested additional projections to determine options for the total ACL that would meet rebuilding requirements
- The SSC provided an OFL of 367,000 lbs gw (2023), approximately 185,000 lbs gw (or 34%) lower than the average estimated total landings from 2015-2019 (551,780 lbs gw, SEDAR 71)
- The SSC will provide an ABC at their October 2021 meeting

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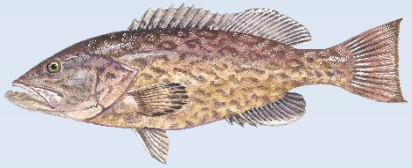

- **Observations on Abundance**
  - Higher abundance is noted in deeper waters
  - Some areas fishermen have seen no change an increase in abundance
  - Other areas there has been a notable decrease in gag abundance, possibly due to:
    - Increase in recreational and commercial diving
    - Lower fuel cost/more people offshore
    - Bottom habitat disruptions/climate change
- **Observations on Size**
  - Must fish further offshore for larger fish
  - Decrease in the size of the fish seen in the commercial sector
  - Charter industry consistently catching undersize fish

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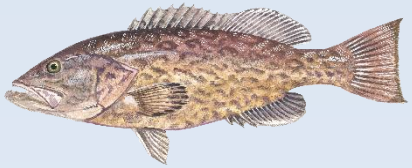

- **Observations on Discards**
  - Both sectors are discarding smaller fish
  - Not many discards during the closed season
- **Observations on Demand/Dependence**
  - Demand has been increasing
  - Loss of fishing infrastructure has been a major concern
  - A hook & line survey and annual estimate of abundance would be beneficial

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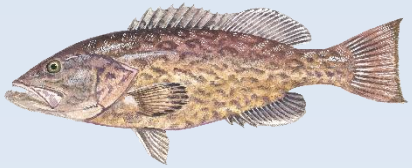

- **Environmental Observations**
  - Hurricanes have been disrupting ledges and other bottom habitat
  - Degradation of estuarine habitat is a major concern for Gag
- **Other Observations**
  - Fishery independent surveys are crucial
  - Enhanced enforcement needed
  - A hook & line survey and annual estimate of abundance would be beneficial

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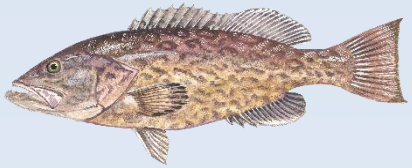
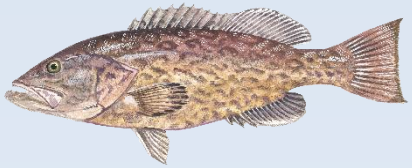


- **Recommendations on Management**
  - Extend the spawning season closure
    - Include May, possibly also December
  - Increase minimum size
    - 25 or 26 inch minimum
    - 50% female Gag mature at 25 in
  - Establish shallow water SMZs
    - 30-50 ft

Discussion Questions



The rebuilding plan for gag grouper (10 years or less) will result in substantial decreases to annual catch limits.

1. What should management priorities for the commercial fishery be during this rebuilding time frame?

2. Should changes to commercial management measures other than annual catch limits also be considered?

3. What should management priorities for the recreational fishery be during this rebuilding time frame?

4. Should changes to recreational management measures other than annual catch limits also be considered?