

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
Red Grouper Fishery Performance Report
Discussion Questions
April 2023

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) is being asked to provide information to update the fishery performance report (FPR) for red grouper. The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR for red grouper will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP) to complement material being used in the upcoming operational stock assessment (SEDAR 86) and to inform future management.

The questions listed below are intended to provoke thoughts about the current state and changes to the red grouper stock and fishery. However, some questions may not be applicable at this time. The scope of the FPR is not limited to the questions listed below, as the intent is to incorporate all relevant observational information that can help with assessing and developing management measures for red grouper.

Notes from the current [Red Grouper FPR](#) (completed in 2017) are listed under each of the question categories. The AP is asked to review these notes to determine whether they are still applicable and respond with any updates that should be made.

Questions for Advisory Panel:

The AP is asked to provide the following information about red grouper based on their expertise, as appropriate:

1) Have there been **substantial changes** in the red grouper fishery since 2017 (year of the last FPR)? If so, describe the timing, location, and what you think caused the change

2) Fishing Behavior/Catch Levels:

- Have there been effort shifts to/from red grouper? If so, please describe, including the time frame for when these shifts occurred.
- Have there been considerable changes in fishing techniques and/or gear used to target red grouper? If so, please describe, including the time frame for when these changes occurred.
- Do you actively avoid fishing for red grouper in certain areas to avoid catching undersized fish or highly regulated fish (e.g., red snapper)?
- What do you see in terms of discards in the commercial sector? In the recreational sector?
 - How often are red grouper discarded? What are the reasons they are discarded?
 - Do you encounter red grouper as bycatch when fishing for other species? If so, what species are being targeted on these trips?

- Do you think discard mortality is a significant factor for this species? Has this changed? If so, please describe, including the time frame when the change occurred.

Current FPR Notes

- Fishery primarily occurs off North Carolina
 - Red grouper are typically not the primary target of commercial trips.
 - Commonly caught on multispecies commercial trips when scamp is the primary target.
- South Carolina – Bycatch species since mid-1980s.
- Georgia – Red grouper are incidentally caught and not common
 - North Florida
 - Not a target species, but are caught as small part of multi-species snapper grouper fishery
- South Florida
 - Recreationally caught in 60 ft depth and shallower.
 - Recent increase in targeting via spearfishing, possibly due to [at the time] upcoming restrictions on hogfish.
 - Popularity in spearfishing has grown due to shallow depths and being easy to shoot; also overall increase in recreational vessels and popularity of spearfishing in general along the Florida east coast.
- Florida Keys
 - When commercial harvest is open, red grouper are in deeper water and less accessible.
 - May be affected by increased spearfishing.
- Rarely caught by the recreational sector in 2015-2016. Potentially some reduction in sizes recently observed by the recreational fishery.

3) Social and economic influences:

- For the commercial sector, how have price and demand for red grouper changed?
 - Is there increased demand for a specific size of red grouper (e.g. plate sized)?
- How has demand for charter/headboat trips targeting red grouper changed?
- Among the species you target, how important are red grouper to your overall business (charter or commercial)?
- What communities are dependent on the red grouper fishery?
- Have changes in infrastructure (docks, marinas, fish houses) affected fishing opportunities for red grouper?
- How have fishermen and communities adapted to changes in the red grouper fishery?

Current FPR Notes

- East Florida – red grouper is not a key commercial species. There is demand for grouper in general, but not much demand specifically for red grouper.
- Red grouper has smaller commercial yield compared to other groupers due to large

head and relatively less meat, so there is little consumer or restaurant demand.

- Florida Keys – Gulf red grouper can be up to \$6/lb, but Keys fishermen cannot take advantage of this price due to seasonal access issues. Mexico has a closure as well, so during the closed season, Florida Keys dealers can sell red grouper for up to \$10.99/lb. Generally, when demand is high, the price ranges from \$5-\$10/lb.

4) **Management measures:**

- Are there new management measures that the Council should consider or are there existing management measures (such as size limit, trip limit, bag limit, season, etc.) that should be changed?
- Are the current ACL and allocations appropriate for each sector?

Current FPR Notes

- Minimum size limit may have limited benefit due to depth and release mortality.
- Florida Keys – red grouper are hardy and less likely to suffer barotrauma; current minimum size limit is sufficient.
- Seasonal closure is important to keep.
- Current management measures do not significantly limit ability to catch and keep red grouper.

5) **Environmental/ecological/habitat:**

- Do you perceive that the abundance of red grouper has changed over the past ten years? If so, how has it changed?
- When/where are the fish available, and has this changed? For instance, has there been any shift in catch (annually/seasonally) inshore/offshore or north/south? If so, please describe.
- Has the size of the fish that you typically encounter changed? If so, could you briefly describe the trend?
- Have you noticed any unique effects of environmental conditions on red grouper? If so, please describe.
- What are your observations on the timing and length of the red grouper spawning season in your area (time periods when fish are observed with large ovaries or eggs spilling out externally or while venting)?
- What do you see now in terms of recruitment? Where are the small fish? Are large and small fish found in the same locations?
- Have you observed changes in catch depth or apparent bottom type fished on?
- How have sea conditions (monthly/seasonally) affected fishable days?
- Have you noticed any change in the species caught with red grouper over the years or seasonally?

Current FPR Notes

- Sizes of fish have been consistent
- Depths: 80-100 ft or 140-180 ft

- North Carolina
 - Can be mixed with triggerfish at the shelf edge (140-180 ft) off Morehead City, NC.
 - Previously observed by divers at depths as shallow as 80 ft, but notable decline in abundance since around 2008.
- South Carolina
 - Off Charleston, SC, found patchily distributed on low relief bottom (“porgy bottom”).
 - Potential impacts on available habitat from past use of roller trawls.
- North Florida
 - Caught near the shelf edge at 140-180 ft
 - Sizes and availability have been consistent, with weights ranging 7-20 lbs
- Florida Keys
 - Some abundance on the shallow end of the reef, especially in the Lower Keys.
 - Big fish sometimes caught on the outer reef. Smaller fish in shallow reef waters.
 - No observed issues with abundance. Typically more abundance when water is colder, but this also coincides with the seasonal closure.
- Small red grouper (5-6 inches) sometimes caught in east Florida estuaries, and red grouper less than 20 inches can be found in patches in shallow waters.
- Potential cyclical abundance trend lasting about 7-9 years, with potential low period during the mid-2010s.
- Decline in abundance since the 4-month closure (closed January-April for GA/FL and closed January-May for NC/SC) went into place, potentially due to increased effort off North Carolina in anticipation of the closure (Jan-Apr closure went into place in 2010 throughout the region; was revised to current structure beginning in 2020)
- Florida fishermen have not seen declines in abundance like what’s been reported off North Carolina
- Research Recommendations
 - Life history studies, especially on inshore juveniles
 - Effects of MPAs on local abundances
 - Impacts of lionfish on recruitment
 - Impacts of potential increases in spearfishing (possibly local effects)

6) Other:

- What else is important for the Council to know about red grouper?

Stock Risk Rating

With the recent Council-approved Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule Amendment, the Council is incorporating an evaluation of how much management risk (accepted probability of overfishing) is appropriate based on biological, fishery (human interaction), and environmental factors affecting each stock. Input on these factors will be provided ahead of each assessment by the appropriate advisory panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Council will consider this input in developing a Stock Risk Rating that will be used with

the relative biomass level from the stock assessment to determine the appropriate risk level (P*) to apply in the new ABC Control Rule. The AP's role of reviewing the Stock Risk Rating will typically occur as part of the FPR development process. However, Council staff is currently revising the application used to provide an overview of the fishery for FPR development. Therefore, review of the Stock Risk Rating for red grouper will occur at a future AP meeting, after the application has been updated to include all Stock Risk Rating information.