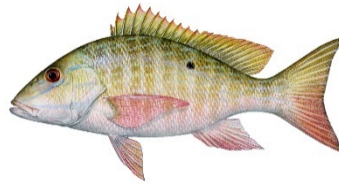


# Stakeholder Comments on Staff Suggested Changes for Mutton Snapper Management

November 12, 2015



Following the publication of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's November agenda, the Commission received many emails and letters in response to the mutton snapper agenda item. The writers of these letters represent a diverse group of stakeholders: 2 commercial fishermen, 3 recreational anglers, 2 recreational angling groups, 1 conservation group, 1 tackle industry representative, and 6 charter captains and guides. The commenters express almost universal support for reducing mutton snapper harvest during the spawning season (May-June). While there is majority support for lowering the recreational bag limit for mutton snapper outside of the spawning season (July-April), the recommended reductions differ. Only one stakeholder was against any reduction in recreational bag limit or commercial trip limit.

## *Spawning Season*

The commenters have varied ideas about how reductions in mutton snapper harvest during the spawning season should be achieved. The most common suggestions are to prohibit harvest during the spawning season and to close Western Dry Rocks and other mutton snapper spawning aggregation sites. There is some support for either a two fish per person recreational bag limit or a vessel limit of two fish for recreational and commercial harvesters during the spawning season. One commenter suggests reducing the commercial trip limit during the spawning season, and another individual recommends a specific commercial trip limit of two fish per vessel during this time.

One commenter notes that because amberjack roe is commonly used as bait for mutton snapper during the spawning season, reducing or eliminating harvest of mutton snapper during its spawning season would also protect spawning amberjacks.

There are a few suggestions that the spawning season should be expanded to include April or July.

## *General Regulations*

The most common recommendation for reducing the recreational bag limit outside of the spawning season (July-Apr) is 5 fish per person, followed by 2 fish per person, and then 5 fish per vessel.

There are other general suggestions for mutton snapper to be managed through vessel limits and to implement a slot limit. One individual suggests increasing the minimum size limit.

Only one person commented on commercial trip limits. He suggests that the Commission consider trip limits of 300, 400, and 500 pounds outside of the spawning season. However, he notes that a single trip limit for all commercial harvesters would significantly impact the longline fishery and hook and line fishermen that take multi-day trips.

## *Conclusion*

Several commenters express the importance of consistent regulations between state and federal waters. One individual recommends that federal management of mutton snapper be delegated to the state. Two of the commenters strongly support the Commission taking the lead in considering changes to mutton snapper regulations and encourage the Commission to hold public meetings on the topic.

The diversity of comments and suggestions regarding the proposal to consider changes for mutton snapper harvest suggests that holding public workshops on this item would be of value to the Commission.