

Fisheries-independent data for hogfish (*Lachnolaimus maximus*) from reef-fish visual surveys in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas, 1994-2012.

Steven G. Smith¹, Jerald S. Ault¹, James A. Bohnsack², Jeremiah Blondeau², Alejandro Acosta³, Jeffrey Renchen³, Michael W. Feeley⁴, and Tracy A. Ziegler⁵

¹University of Miami, Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, 4600 Rickenbacker Causeway, Miami, FL 33149

²National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, 75 Virginia Beach Drive, Miami, FL 33149

³Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, 2796 Overseas Highway, Suite 119, Marathon, FL 33050

⁴National Park Service, South Florida-Caribbean Network, 18001 Old Cutler Suite 419, Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

⁵National Park Service, Everglades/Dry Tortugas National Park, 40001 State Road 9336, Homestead, FL 33034-6733

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Introduction

The southern Florida coral reef ecosystem supports lucrative fishing and tourism economies (Ault et al., 2005a). Fishery-dependent (FD) information has been the principal data source supporting stock assessments to address the key management objectives of preventing overfishing and sustaining benefits from tropical ecosystems with high species diversity (Pauly and Morgan, 1987; Gallucci et al., 1996; Sparre and Venema, 1998). However, there are risks in basing assessments entirely upon data from extractive fishing operations (Walters and Martell, 2004; Rotherham et al., 2007). Numerous sources of bias and uncertainty may arise from the process of obtaining catch-effort data from the wide variety of vessels, capture gears, and landing sites typical of tropical reef fisheries. Also problematic is the nonrandom strategy of catching fishes employed by fishers with respect to the spatial distributions of species and habitats. Many of these potential biases and uncertainties can be eliminated through the controlled sampling approach offered by fishery-independent (FI) surveys. These surveys can be designed to provide the same size-structured abundance estimates as FD surveys for conducting modern stock assessments (Ault et al., 1998, 2005b; Smith and Lundy, 2006). In addition, FI surveys can sample pre-exploited life stages of fishery species and thus provide indices of recruitment to the exploited stock.

Fishery-independent diver visual sampling of the reef-fish community in southern Florida began in 1979 in shallow fore-reef habitats (depth < 10 m), and was conducted by scientists from NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). Scientists from the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science (RSMAS) began collaborating with NOAA scientists on the visual surveys in 1993, and in 1994 the survey was expanded to cover the full range of reef habitats to depths of 33 m along the coral reef tract extending from Miami to Key West. In 1999, the visual survey was further expanded to the Dry Tortugas region. In 2008, scientists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Park Service joined the survey effort as full partners along with NOAA-SEFSC and UM-RSMAS.

This paper presents abundance data for hogfish (*Lachnolaimus maximus*) populations in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas from diver visual surveys. For the Florida Keys, data are provided for both pre-exploited (fork length < 300 mm) and exploited (fork length \geq 300 mm) life stages of hogfish for annual diver surveys from 1994 to 2012. For the Dry Tortugas region, hogfish data (pre-exploited and exploited) are provided for

surveys conducted in 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 (surveys in the Dry Tortugas have been conducted biannually since 2004).

Methods

Visual sampling was conducted along the Florida coral reef tract that extends about 400 km southwest from Miami to the Dry Tortugas (Fig. 1A). The reef tract lies within the management boundaries of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) and two national parks, Biscayne and Dry Tortugas (Fig. 1B). The spatial domain of the survey encompassed the full extent of mapped Holocene live-coral reef habitats (Fig. 1A, red) to 33 m depths. The domain was subdivided into two regions, the Florida Keys (Miami to Key West, 564 km²) and the Dry Tortugas (338 km²). Environmental features, including depth and benthic habitat classifications, that correlate with the spatial distribution of reef-fishes were used to partition the survey area into subareas (i.e., strata) of low, moderate, and high variation in abundance. The sampling design also incorporated a network of no-take marine reserves as an additional stratification variable (Fig. 1B, green). This network is comprised of 23 mostly small reserves established in the Florida Keys (FKNMS) in 1997, and several large reserves established in the Dry Tortugas in 2001 (FKNMS) and 2007 (Dry Tortugas National Park)(Ault et al., 2006, 2013).

The field sampling method employed highly trained and experienced divers using SCUBA Nitrox to collect biological data following a standard, non-destructive, in situ monitoring protocol in which a stationary diver records reef-fish data (number and sizes of each species) while centered in a randomly selected circular plot 15 m in diameter (Bohnsack and Bannerot, 1986; Brandt et al., 2009). Principal metrics evaluated were reef fish species density (i.e., the number of individuals per unit sample area of 177 m², the area of a diver circular plot) and species length composition. Density and length composition can subsequently be used to produce additional metrics such as abundance-at-length and biomass. Statistical estimation procedures followed Cochran (1977) and Thompson (2002) for a two-stage stratified random sampling design. Computational methods are detailed in Smith et al. (2011). For the visual surveys, the primary sample unit (PSU) was a 200 by 200 m habitat grid cell (the minimum mapping unit for benthic habitat classification), and the second-stage unit (SSU) was a diver circular plot. In most cases, each SSU was sampled by a buddy pair of divers. For analysis, each SSU metric was computed as the arithmetic average of the stationary

counts for a buddy team. Biomass computations converted SSU numbers-at-length to total weight using a weight-length conversion for hogfish from Ault et al. 2005b.

Results/Discussion

Visual survey estimates of hogfish mean density and precision (CV, coefficient of variation) for pre-exploited and exploited life stages are given in Table 1 for the Florida Keys (Table 1A) and Dry Tortugas (Table 1B) regions. The CV of mean density is the standard error expressed as a percentage of the mean, and is sometimes referred to as the 'relative error'. Survey precision improved in the late 1990s—early 2000s due to refinements in the benthic habitat maps, statistical design, and efficiency of field sampling (Smith et al. 2011). In the Florida Keys, mean density of exploited phase hogfish increased from the late 1990s to mid-2000s (Fig. 2A, solid diamonds), whereas density in the Dry Tortugas (Fig. 2A, open diamonds) was relatively stable during this period. A decline in density of exploited phase hogfish was observed in both regions following the intense hurricane period of 2004-2005 in south Florida, followed by a rebound from 2006 to 2008. After 2008, exploited phase density has decreased somewhat in the Florida Keys but appears to have increased in the Dry Tortugas. In contrast, density of pre-exploited hogfish has remained relatively stable in both regions since 2000 (Fig. 2B). Exploited phase densities are more or less similar in magnitude in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas, whereas pre-exploited densities are substantially higher in the Florida Keys compared to the Dry Tortugas.

Survey estimates of hogfish abundance-at-length using the procedures of Smith et al. (2011) are given in Appendix A for the Florida Keys and Appendix B for the Dry Tortugas. Hogfish relative length frequencies (derived from the values in the appendices) for the 2012 visual surveys in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas are shown in Fig. 3. These results illustrate some general differences between the two regions that have been observed in the visual surveys dating back to 1999 (the start of the Tortugas sampling): the Florida Keys has a higher percentage of pre-exploited phase hogfish and a lower percentage of exploited phase hogfish compared to the Dry Tortugas (Ault et al., 2013). Moreover, the average size of hogfish in the exploited life stage is higher in the Dry Tortugas compared to the Florida Keys (Fig. 4). It follows that mean biomass of exploited phase hogfish has generally been higher in the Dry Tortugas compared to the Florida Keys over the survey history (Fig. 5), owing to the larger-sized fish in the Dry Tortugas.

An important feature of the southern Florida reef-fish visual survey is that it employs a non-destructive sampling method. This aspect of the visual survey makes it very advantageous for sampling inside no-take marine reserves, thereby obtaining information on a portion of the hogfish stock that is not sampled by commercial or recreational fishers (Smith et al., 2011). Although no-take marine reserves occupy a small area within the Florida Keys region, they are fairly extensive in the Dry Tortugas (Fig. 1B; Ault et al., 2006, 2013).

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Figure 1. South Florida reef fish visual survey domain. (A) Seafloor morphology of the coral reef ecosystem and the Straits of Florida with mapped coral reef habitats (red) in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas; depths are represented by the color scale; land is black. (B) Managed area boundaries for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (blue), Biscayne, Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks (tan), and no-take marine reserves (green).

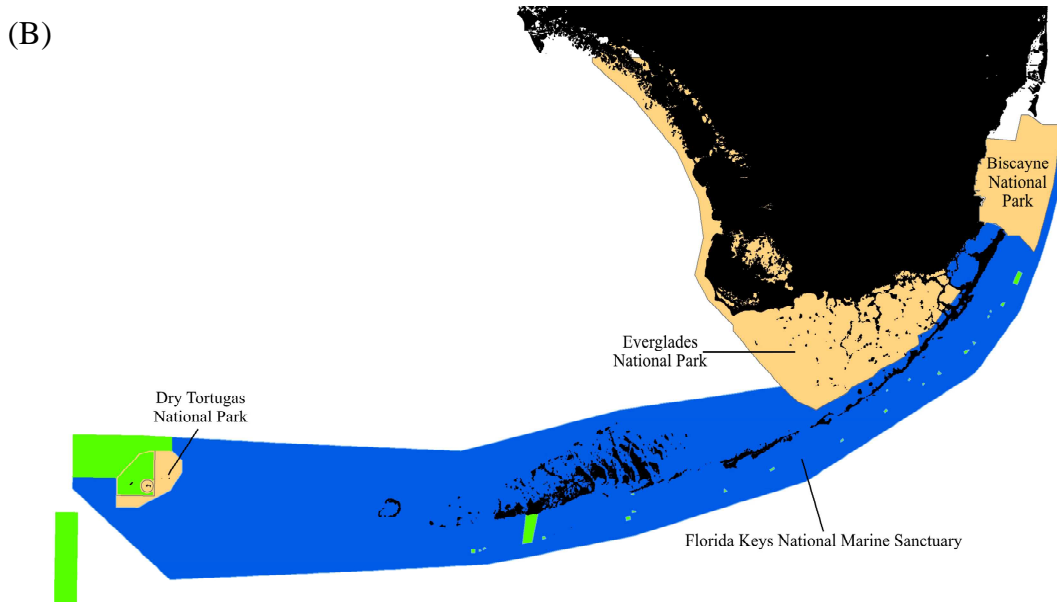
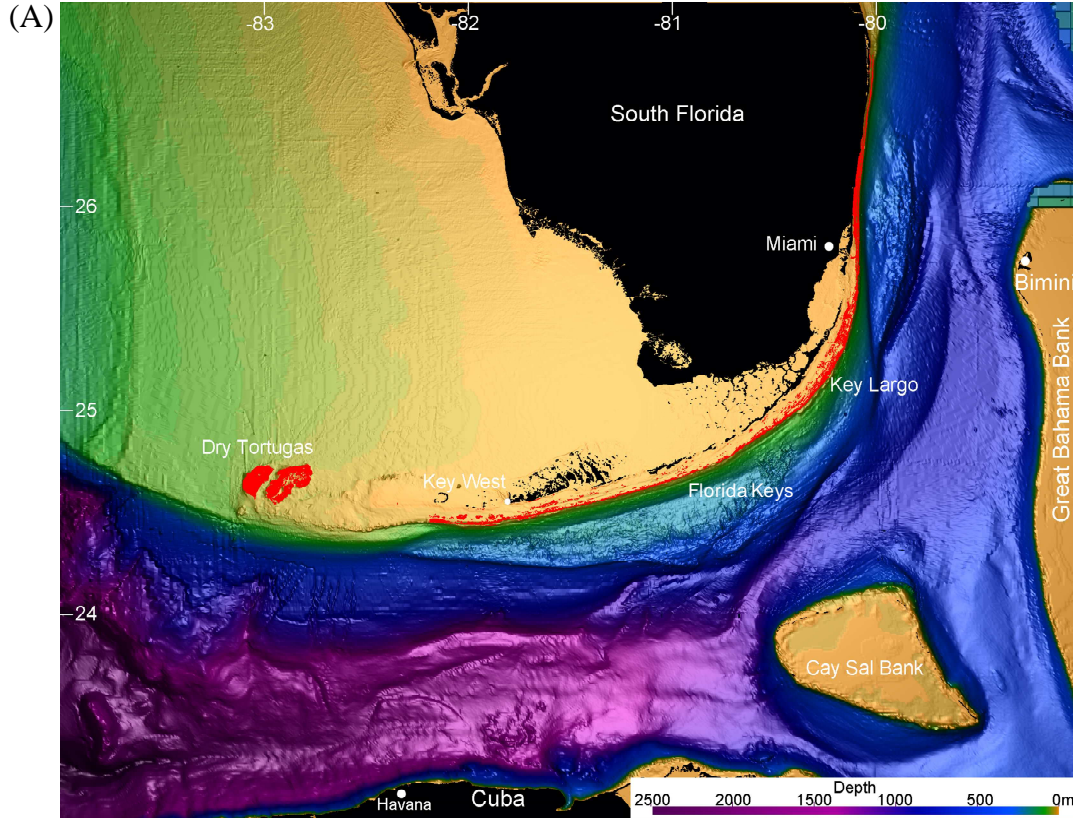


Table 1. Visual survey estimates of hogfish mean density and precision (CV) for pre-exploited and exploited life stages for the (A) Florida Keys and (B) Dry Tortugas regions. Density units are number of fish per 177 m² (second-stage unit SSU). Sample sizes: n = primary sample units, nm = second-stage units.

(A) Florida Keys

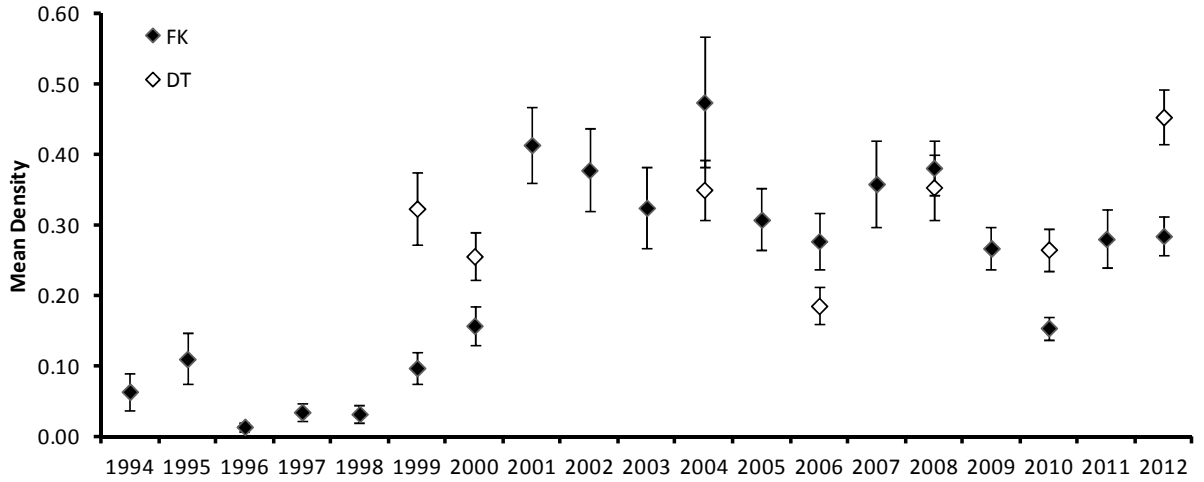
Year	n	nm	Pre-exploited Density (L<300 mm)		Exploited Density (L≥300 mm)		All Sizes	
			Mean	CV (%)	Mean	CV (%)	Mean	CV (%)
1994	24	117	0.2414	39.4	0.0629	41.9	0.3346	26.9
1995	61	278	0.2701	24.5	0.1093	33.2	0.3791	19.5
1996	27	143	0.1560	42.1	0.0132	44.5	0.1739	38.4
1997	66	388	0.3453	22.7	0.0340	35.7	0.3805	21.7
1998	75	428	0.3185	18.9	0.0314	36.3	0.3649	16.0
1999	160	408	0.4897	12.1	0.0965	23.3	0.5951	10.3
2000	228	499	0.8182	10.3	0.1565	17.1	0.9380	9.8
2001	304	701	1.0144	10.1	0.4130	12.8	1.3825	9.2
2002	356	665	0.8068	8.8	0.3774	15.6	1.1839	8.6
2003	237	433	0.8685	12.2	0.3239	17.6	1.1928	12.1
2004	136	259	0.7425	12.6	0.4736	19.6	1.2161	12.2
2005	256	498	0.9299	12.4	0.3070	14.3	1.2370	10.6
2006	328	593	0.7323	8.8	0.2767	14.4	1.0090	8.6
2007	317	614	0.7265	9.9	0.3578	17.3	1.0843	10.5
2008	376	735	1.2754	6.7	0.3806	10.4	1.6560	6.5
2009	516	1005	0.9641	6.2	0.2665	10.9	1.2307	6.3
2010	379	740	0.9527	8.0	0.1534	10.8	1.1060	7.4
2011	402	789	0.8121	8.3	0.2798	14.7	1.0919	7.7
2012	416	803	1.0522	6.8	0.2839	9.4	1.3361	6.3

(B) Dry Tortugas

Year	n	nm	Pre-exploited Density (L<300 mm)		Exploited Density (L≥300 mm)		All Sizes	
			Mean	CV (%)	Mean	CV (%)	Mean	CV (%)
1999	168	298	0.4286	19.6	0.3229	16.0	0.7514	12.9
2000	203	360	0.2661	13.9	0.2552	13.1	0.5267	9.7
2004	310	576	0.1189	19.7	0.3494	11.9	0.4683	10.6
2006	260	497	0.2737	14.2	0.1848	14.0	0.4585	9.2
2008	338	653	0.2177	21.8	0.3530	13.4	0.5707	13.9
2010	364	703	0.1677	13.3	0.2648	11.2	0.4325	9.0
2012	416	813	0.1907	11.4	0.4528	8.7	0.6435	7.7

Figure 2. Visual survey estimates of hogfish mean density (\pm SE) for (A) exploited and (B) pre-exploited life stages during 1994-2012 in the Florida Keys (solid diamonds) and Dry Tortugas (open diamonds). Density units are number of fish per SSU.

(A) Exploited Life Stage ($L \geq 300$ mm)



(B) Pre-exploited Life Stage ($L < 300$ mm)

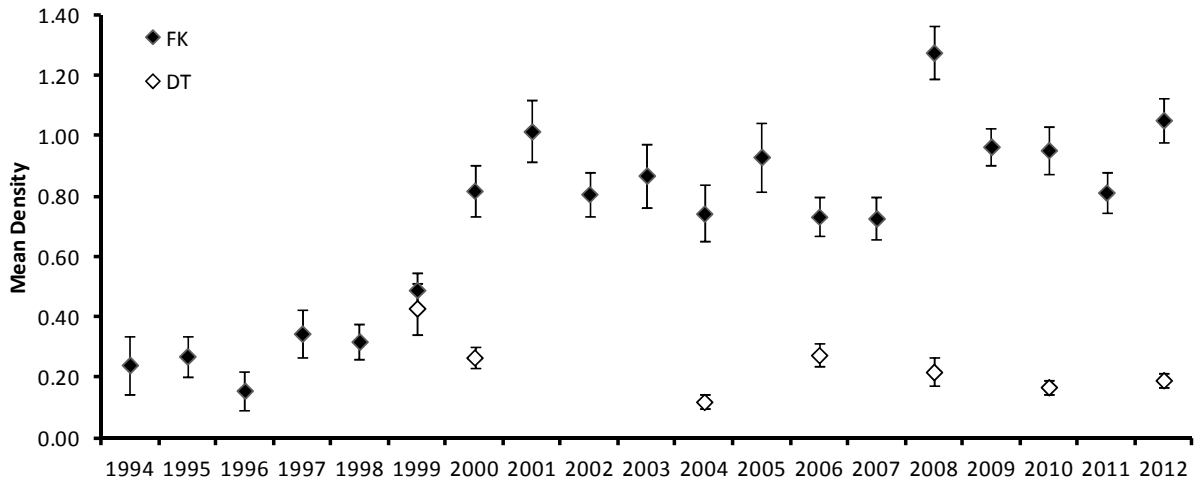


Figure 3. Hogfish length frequency histograms for 2012 visual surveys in the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas. Shaded bars denote the exploited life stage.

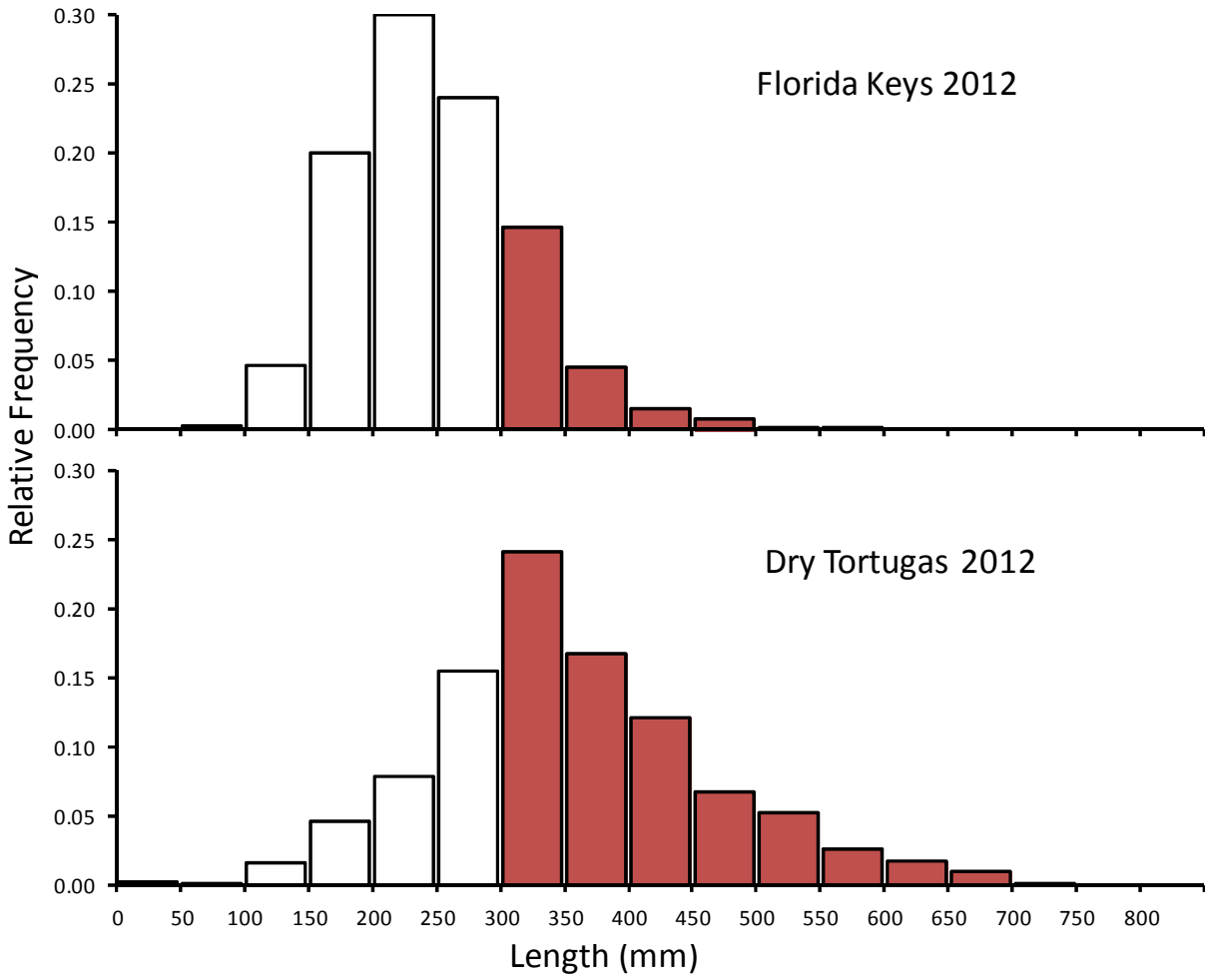


Figure 4. Visual survey estimates of average length (\pm SE) of exploited phase hogfish during 1994-2012 in the Florida Keys (FK, solid circles) and Dry Tortugas (DT, open circles). The lower dashed line is the minimum legal length of capture (LC).

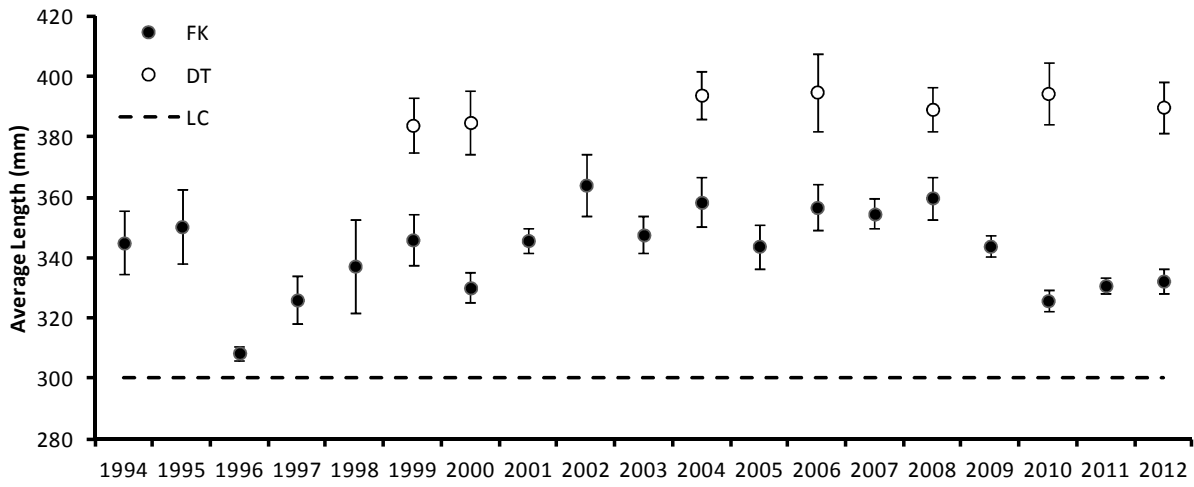
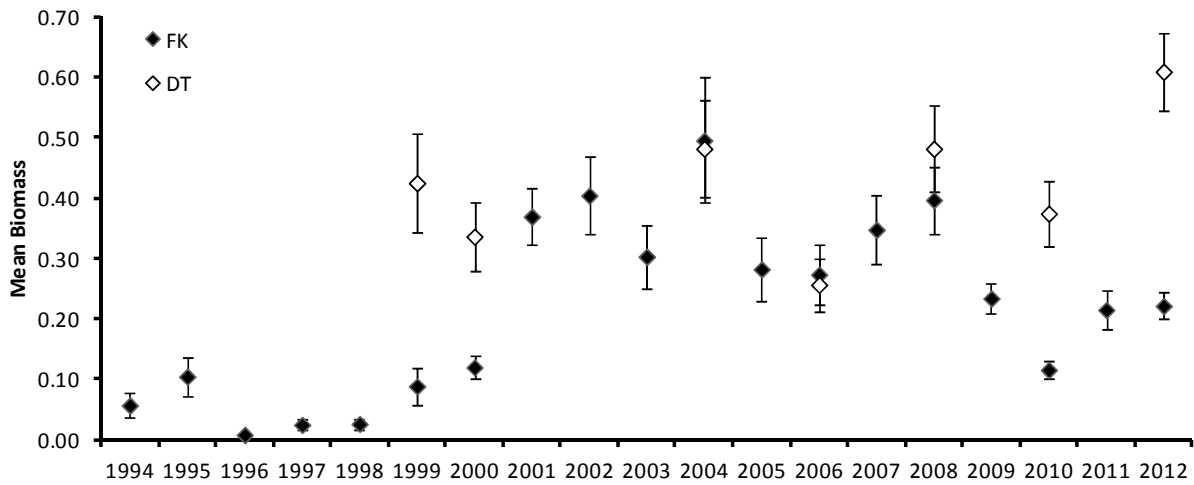


Figure 5. Visual survey estimates of mean biomass (kg per SSU) and associated standard errors for exploited phase hogfish during 1994-2012 in the Florida Keys (FK, solid diamonds) and Dry Tortugas (DT, open diamonds).



Appendix B. Visual survey estimates of hogfish abundance-at-length, Dry Tortugas, 1999-2012.

species	Length (cm)	_1999	_2000	_2004	_2006	_2008	_2010	_2012
LAC MAXI	1	0	0	0	0	0	2490	0
LAC MAXI	2	0	0	0	617	3339	1781	0
LAC MAXI	3	15710	2039	0	12086	0	0	1513
LAC MAXI	4	0	0	0	8318	434	0	356
LAC MAXI	5	1313	2039	12227	1228	0	353	356
LAC MAXI	6	5237	2039	0	351	0	0	124
LAC MAXI	7	0	0	4388	0	3339	0	356
LAC MAXI	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	587
LAC MAXI	9	0	4017	0	23589	419	0	124
LAC MAXI	10	0	0	6113	33728	434	533	356
LAC MAXI	11	2626	2039	245	23589	3616	0	231
LAC MAXI	12	8098	13828	4644	617	410	1781	4350
LAC MAXI	13	0	6712	3637	0	1727	5439	1124
LAC MAXI	14	32267	21260	0	336	18523	16758	13471
LAC MAXI	15	68964	31793	6797	15915	8853	14850	14452
LAC MAXI	16	45528	23693	10132	30355	17341	2472	7411
LAC MAXI	17	91083	26501	927	3315	11172	5373	3315
LAC MAXI	18	83356	32951	2745	32079	15043	9116	21463
LAC MAXI	19	29510	4718	2686	4747	13827	23938	9125
LAC MAXI	20	106066	63918	27572	70820	39190	33720	32268
LAC MAXI	21	5260	11563	61	7667	11108	1071	6356
LAC MAXI	22	49924	35982	32354	43166	50510	9512	17563
LAC MAXI	23	36313	15135	743	8587	15066	23558	11692
LAC MAXI	24	16346	31895	11629	10490	24889	31067	27964
LAC MAXI	25	102329	58685	61172	75811	56532	69520	56166
LAC MAXI	26	25563	41411	7421	46305	25523	25517	34531
LAC MAXI	27	20913	16861	2414	27854	41539	9712	32269
LAC MAXI	28	50208	50089	18435	40559	36390	33526	38841
LAC MAXI	29	17700	8570	9742	4613	26249	3830	28371
LAC MAXI	30	135236	105413	105373	54375	114492	86935	103910
LAC MAXI	31	16163	11204	2194	4703	15727	6226	32172
LAC MAXI	32	59236	34769	22255	13392	37966	31750	71388
LAC MAXI	33	19832	14409	3265	2923	19869	22995	41148
LAC MAXI	34	12454	19884	4767	15461	22263	25591	48050
LAC MAXI	35	108822	80794	160223	77271	97288	69761	123912
LAC MAXI	36	24600	6109	3907	3198	22742	7777	22297
LAC MAXI	37	6220	4675	12258	5120	11417	12000	14346
LAC MAXI	38	16467	16971	7157	9920	31350	25429	40933
LAC MAXI	39	5237	5657	3388	0	4850	9760	4676
LAC MAXI	40	47000	52238	148167	40248	90094	56618	93329
LAC MAXI	41	574	5657	0	0	711	211	11274
LAC MAXI	42	16574	8060	11045	6236	44565	11056	17622
LAC MAXI	43	7234	4582	21767	336	4271	3985	17699
LAC MAXI	44	842	2634	2194	2643	3517	3145	9374
LAC MAXI	45	34595	54382	70141	58914	55423	27569	68751
LAC MAXI	46	5237	6002	0	2306	7946	4274	1883
LAC MAXI	47	1582	1919	0	0	2609	3332	5600
LAC MAXI	48	11019	1919	128	2643	19319	5419	6152
LAC MAXI	49	0	0	510	0	837	0	386
LAC MAXI	50	40204	20767	43546	20145	9552	36039	52247
LAC MAXI	51	0	0	0	0	1137	353	3883
LAC MAXI	52	17176	2240	2938	4955	419	4324	5793
LAC MAXI	53	0	0	3637	0	0	1003	1637
LAC MAXI	54	0	0	0	0	0	1781	682
LAC MAXI	55	10473	15061	2441	3921	9022	20011	18935
LAC MAXI	56	0	0	0	0	0	571	5476
LAC MAXI	57	0	0	0	0	0	1781	0
LAC MAXI	58	0	5657	682	0	266	323	7733
LAC MAXI	59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	60	9042	6102	25618	19491	16973	14593	14868
LAC MAXI	61	0	0	0	336	0	0	510
LAC MAXI	62	5237	0	510	0	0	217	4063
LAC MAXI	63	0	0	510	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	64	0	0	0	0	0	0	2096
LAC MAXI	65	5725	0	2784	0	10173	1930	10423
LAC MAXI	66	0	0	0	0	0	0	386
LAC MAXI	67	574	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	68	0	0	0	0	0	211	214
LAC MAXI	69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	70	0	11314	6113	0	4873	2490	741
LAC MAXI	71	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	73	1582	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	74	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	75	2298	0	211	617	0	649	0
LAC MAXI	76	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	77	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	79	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	80	0	0	128	0	5162	217	0
LAC MAXI	81	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	82	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	83	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	84	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAC MAXI	85	0	0	768	0	0	0	0