

7. Goliath Grouper Assessment

7.1. Documents:

Attachment 9. SEDAR 23 Assessment Report of Goliath Grouper.

7.2. Overview

Staff Contact: Julie Neer

A benchmark stock assessment for Goliath grouper was conducted through SEDAR 23 at the request of the State of Florida. The assessment team was led by analysts from the Florida Marine Research Institute and followed a condensed SEDAR benchmark process in order to complete the assessment in time for the Florida Wildlife Commission meeting in December 2010.

The assessment panel choose to use a catch-free model, as goliath grouper have been under a moratorium since 1990 and the historic catch streams are highly uncertain. The catch-free model employed was the same model framework used when goliath grouper was last assessed under SEDAR 6. One important caveat to the catch-free model is that it cannot produce absolute estimates of population parameters such as fishing mortality or abundance or stock status, but rather relative measures scaled to an assumed equilibrium biomass. The review panel raised a variety of issues with recommended implementation of the model and after much discussion, determined it could not recommend any population benchmark estimates or stock status.

7.3. Presentations

Assessment Overview: Joe O'Hop, FL FWC

Review Panel Overview and Recommendations: Luiz Barbieri (RW chair)

7.4. ACTIONS

- Review the Goliath Grouper assessment and evaluate its adequacy for supporting fishing level recommendations and management actions.
- Comment on the degree to which the assessment incorporates and addresses uncertainties
- Apply the SAFMC ABC control rule to the Goliath Grouper assessment and recommend a P* value.
- Provide fishing level recommendations for Goliath Grouper.
- Provide recommendations for the timing, methods, and data needs of future goliath grouper assessments

SSC Consensus Recommendations

OFL unknown.

ABC=0 for directed Goliath grouper harvest, i.e., no directed fishery.

SSC Discussion

The SSC supports conclusions of the SEDAR 23 Review Panel. Since the assessment was rejected, stock status is unknown (both for exploitation and biomass levels). Therefore, the SSC recommends setting OFL as unknown and an ABC=0 for directed Goliath grouper harvest, i.e., continue current regulations with no directed fishery. Because the

assessment is not adequate to support quantitative fishing level recommendations, no P^ value can be derived and the degree to which uncertainties are addressed cannot be properly evaluated.*

The SSC believes it is unlikely that overfishing is occurring, based on the effects of the existing moratorium and survey-based evidence of increasing stock abundance. There is evidence the stock is recovering.

Bycatch mortality: Current bycatch/discard losses are expected to be minimal, and it is unknown whether they are of sufficient magnitude to impact stock recovery. Release mortality is apparently low (<5%).

Future Steps/Timing/Assessments:

The SSC supports convening a panel in conjunction with GMFMC to explore approaches to move the fishery beyond the moratorium and collect information to support an informative assessment that will allow determination of stock status and possible recovery. This could be handled through a SEDAR procedural workshop. Further, the SSC supports development of a workshop within the South Atlantic to consider approaches to address Goliath grouper and other stocks that now face unassessed status and no directed fisheries (e.g. Warsaw grouper and speckled hind).