

Some Preliminary Notes on Florida Commercial Landings of Gag Grouper

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A mandatory program for collecting commercial landings in Florida was started by the Florida Department of Natural Resources in 1984. Florida's first full year of official landings is 1986. Original data collected included fisherman license, dealer license, date of landing, area fished, county landed, depth fished, number of traps, soak time, time fished, species, size, amount of catch and unit price. In 1991, gear fished became a mandatory part of the trip ticket. In 1995, under the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, unit price, area fished, and depth became mandatory, though they had been a part of the original trip ticket. In 2000, under the new Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), fields for species grade, number of crew, and disposition of the catch (discards) were added as well.

From 1986-2005, 143,052 trips have been recorded so far where gag were reported landed. In that time, statewide gag landings in Florida have increased from 455 mt in 1986 to 1,425 mt in 2004. Landings in 2005 are at 1,169 mt, but are very preliminary and incomplete. Number of trips has fluctuated from 4,001 in 1986 to 9,173 in 1998. There were 7,531 gag trips reported in 2004.

Approximately 85% of gag landings in Florida come from the Gulf of Mexico. Gulf landings have averaged about 778 mt from 1986-2004, compared to 112 mt from the Atlantic. Statewide, primary gears used for catching commercial gag are hook & line, long line, and electric reel. These gear types account for an average of 52%, 22%, and 19%, respectively, of the total gag landings from 1986-2004. Other gears with notable gag landings were dive/spear and trap. Percentages in the Gulf are very similar to the statewide figures, but longline landings in the Atlantic are replaced by dive/spear landings which rival gag landings by electric reel at about 20% each. Landings by area indicate that in the Gulf, the heaviest catches of gag grouper occur in the central West, Big Bend, and panhandle regions. In the Atlantic, most gag are harvested from off Northeast Florida.

Catch per trip statewide exhibited an increasing trend from 1986-2005 with the highest yield in 2005 at 203 kg per trip. This trend has its heaviest contribution from Gulf of Mexico landings which exhibit a similar trend in catch per trip. Atlantic catch per trip shows only a slight increasing catch per trip during this period. Gag landings by longline show a dramatic increase in catch per trip from 1995-2002, then slightly declining to 2005. Landing by electric reel gradually declined until 1996, then increased dramatically to 157 kg per trip in 1999. Catch per trip has since fluctuated between 150 and 250 kg per trip. Gag landings by hook and line showed a slight increasing trend from 1986-2005. Again, Gulf catch per trip by gear exhibits very similar trends to statewide catch

per trip. But Atlantic catch per trip fluctuates wildly for most gears from 1986-2005, so just looking at the total catch per trip simply smoothes the effects of what's happening there.

A look at statewide species composition from trips where gag were caught shows gag mostly associated with other species in the shallow water grouper complex, snapper complex, porgies, amberjacks, and triggerfish. Similar associations are evident in both the Gulf and Atlantic.

With regard to discards, fishers and dealers were given a way to report discards on trip tickets as of November of 2000. Since then, we've only received 6 records of discarded gag grouper. Price has been a mandatory data element since 1995. Data since 11/2000 show 172 gag records with no price which may be an indication of discarded catch.



FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Office**
100 8th Avenue SE
St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5020
727-822-8783

Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket FISHING AREA CODE MAP

Fishery Management Regulations can be found at the following Web sites:

Federal Waters

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council www.safmc.net/
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council www.gulfcouncil.org/
NOAA Fisheries www.nmfs.noaa.gov

National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office caldera.sero.nmfs.gov/

State Waters

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission www.floridaconservation.org

Our Website

Florida Marine Research Institute www.floridamarine.org

FWC FMRI St Petersburg

Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Office 727/822-8783
FMRI Fax (Trip Ticket Office) 727/894-6181
Florida Marine Research Institute 727/896-8626

FWC Tallahassee

Division of Marine Fisheries 850/487-0554
Licenses and Permits Section 850/487-3122
Marine Fisheries Management 850/488-6058
Marine Fisheries Services 850/922-4340
LAW ENFORCEMENT 888/404-3922

National Marine Fisheries Service

St. Petersburg—Fisheries Mgmt. 727/570-5305
St. Petersburg—Permits 727/570-5326

Federal Councils

S. Atlantic Fishery Mgmt. Council 843/571-4366
Gulf of Mexico Fish. Mgmt. Council 813/228-2815

Interstate Commissions

Atlantic States Marine Fish. Comm. 202/289-6400
Gulf States Marine Fish. Comm. 228/875-5912

