

SEDAR 25 DW

A Note on the Occurrence of Bank Sea Bass (*Centropristis ocyurus*) in the Florida hook and line and Black Sea Bass pot fisheries

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Bank sea bass are an occasional catch in the Florida snapper grouper bottom fishing group. They are marketed commercially with black sea bass and there has been some difficulty with confusing the two species in the landings statistics. I have been bottom fishing the east coast of Florida for the past 53 years. The majority of my experience is bottom fishing from headboats from 1968 to 2008. Most recently it has been in the black sea bass pot fishery from 2009 to present. In my experience the bank sea bass population has always been 5-8% or less of the black sea bass population when hook and line fishing for black sea bass under most conditions. The number of bank sea bass may increase slightly when the boat is pushed away from the ledge by a change in wind or tide. The bank sea bass tend to be off the ledge on sand bottom or scattered shell bottom. When this movement of the boat occurs it has been my experience that I needed to re-anchor the boat. In the commercial pot fishery the number of bank sea bass landings is less than 2% of the black sea bass landed in our area.

In the 53 years that I have been fishing between Cape Canaveral and Jacksonville, Florida the black sea bass population had fluctuated up and down until around 2002 or 2003. Ever since then the abundance of black sea bass is greater than any year since I have been fishing this area. In fact, we now catch black sea bass on all of the normal spots that we always did and on all of the spots that we normally did not. In fact, now there is not an area that my family fishes where we do not catch black sea bass. With the exception of maybe vermilion snappers, they are the most abundant targeted fish in our region that I am aware of.