



Introduction

From the “snapper banks” at 120 ft depths, out to the shelf-edge (180 ft) and upper-slope reefs (to 300 ft), live bottom and hard bottom provide habitat for the red porgy (“pink porgy”) populations that support important commercial and recreational fisheries. Red porgy inhabit natural reefs, mainly in depths from 120-200 ft, where they support commercial and recreational hook-and-line fisheries. Larger adults are found in deeper waters, and spawning occurs in winter at shelf-edge reefs. Managed by federal fishery management agencies as part of the “Snapper-Grouper Complex”, red porgy have been subject to intense fishing pressure, are considered overfished, and are currently subject to several restrictive management measures.

Commercial Fishery Harvest

Red porgy have historically supported a regional offshore fishery, but landings in South Carolina and the southeast region have shown dramatic declines (Figure 1). The vastly reduced landings in the 1990s resulted in severe restrictions on the fishery (see below), which further reduced landings. The value per pound has increased somewhat since the late 1980s, with fishermen being paid over \$1.75 per pound in the most recent year. The decline in catches in the 1990s were a result of overfishing and failure of enough juveniles to survive to adulthood to replace the adults being removed by the fishery. Landings have remained low because of low abundance of red porgy, and very restrictive catch limits.

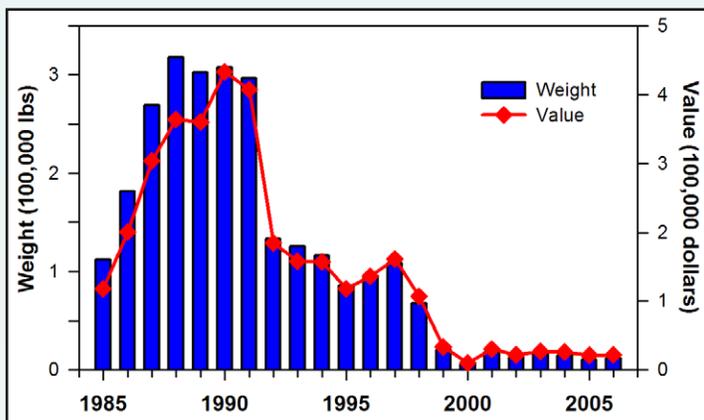


Figure 1. South Carolina commercial red porgy landings in pounds and dollars.

Recreational Fishery Harvest

Red porgy were historically a favorite target species of recreational and, especially, tourist fishermen on head boats (party boats that charge by the head for a full or half day fishing) that advertise “Gulf Stream fishing”. Recreational catches of red porgy in head boat and other recreational fisheries have declined in a trend similar to that seen in the commercial catches (Figure 2). Again, the decline in the catches in the 1990s were a result of overfishing; catches have remained low because of low abundance of red porgy, and very restrictive catch limits

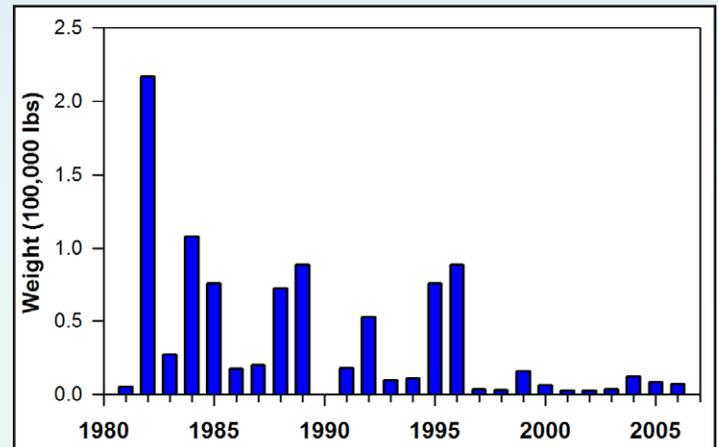


Figure 2. South Carolina recreational red porgy landings in pounds.

Fishery Independent Sampling

Numbers of red porgy in MARMAP (Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment and Prediction) fish trap catches increased in 2007 over the previous several years, and were above the 18-year average (Figure 3). Catches in 2007 were below the maximum reported in 1992. Unusually cold water temperatures were widely reported and measured by us during the 2003 survey, and probably accounted for low catches in that year. Temperatures in 2004-07 were warmer than in 2003, and catch rates recovered to pre-2003 levels. Nonetheless, the fishery-independent survey data show an increasing abundance of fish, suggesting current regulations are proving successful in allowing the rebuilding of the stock.

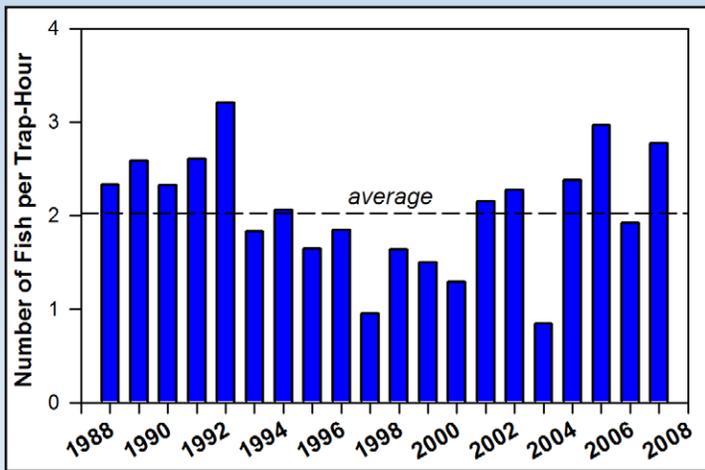
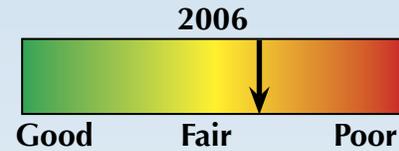


Figure 3. Number of red porgy caught per trap hour in MARMAP fish trap surveys.

has been established (132,000 lbs whole weight). After the commercial quota is met, all purchase and sale is be prohibited and harvest and/or possession limited to the bag limit. The recreational 14-inch minimum size limit remains and the recreational bag limit was increased from one to three red porgy per person per day.



Overall Condition of the Stock and Status of Management

In the 1970s and 1980s, red porgy supported a substantial and important commercial and recreational fishery. By the mid-1990s, catches had declined severely, and by 1999 the commercial fishery was closed because of severe overfishing and concern for complete collapse of the stock. The fishery has since re-opened (in 2000), with several management measures in place that were aimed at recovery of the stock by 2017. Those included minimums sizes (12 inches in 1992; increased to 14 in 1998), no sale from January through April, a one-fish recreational bag limit and a 50-lb bycatch allowance for commercial fishermen. Regulations for 2007 include retaining the commercial 14-inch minimum size limit and the seasonal closure (retention limited to the bag limit), and increasing the commercial trip limit from 50 lbs whole weight to 120 fish (210 lbs gutted weight; 220 lbs whole weight) during May through December. A commercial quota of 127,000 lbs gutted weight



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