

pounds with a dockside value of \$4,054,395¹ (Table 3). In 2020, 1,022,631 pounds of snapper grouper species were caught commercially in North Carolina. The highest landings from the past 27 years were in 2008, after which landings dropped; landings have been under two million pounds for the last ten years (Figure 1). The decline in landings over the past ten years is most likely due to the removal of species from the complex, as well as the changes to ACLs and trip limits and implementation of a seasonal spawning closure by the SAFMC.

Over the last five years, landings have been dominated by six main aggregates; sea bass, grouper, snapper, triggerfish, jacks and tilefish (though the dominant group varies by year) (Table 4). The top ten dominant species are: black sea bass, vermillion snapper, blueline tilefish, gag, triggerfish, red grouper, red porgy, amberjack, scamp, and grunts (NCDMF 2015b).

Recreational Fishery

Recreational fishing uses many of the same gear types as the commercial fishery, with the exception of fish pots and longlines. Recreational estimates across all years have been updated and are now based on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) new Fishing Effort Survey-based calibrated estimates. For more information on MRIP see <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data>.

The average recreational catch of snapper grouper species was 1,956,308² pounds for 1994-2020. Since 2008, the total amount of fish landed declined steadily until 2013 (Table 5, Figure 1). The number of fish harvested declined roughly 60% from 2017 to 2018 and harvest weight decreased 50%. As no major management changes to the recreational sector contributed to this decrease in landings, it is likely due to the impacts of Hurricane Florence on coastal North Carolina. The number of fish harvested increased roughly 30% from 2019 to 2020 and harvest weight increased 78%. Recreational landings (by weight) have dropped roughly 67% since a 25-year high (4,788,307 pounds) in 2008. As with the commercial fishery, this is most likely due to the removal of species from the complex, as well as the changes to ACLs and the seasonal spawning closure by the SAFMC. For the last five years, the number of releases has been around 50% of the total fish caught (driven by the 13-inch (TL) size limit for black sea bass implemented in 2013, which has resulted in an increase of sublegal fish being discarded).

For 2020, the dominant species (by pounds) landed were black sea bass, snappers, jacks, triggerfish, tilefish, and grunts (Table 6). This pattern mainly holds true for the last five years; however, other species are occasionally more dominant.

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA

Fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data collected by NCDMF from the snapper grouper fishery is provided to NOAA Fisheries. In 2006 the division received a Marine Fisheries Initiative Program (MARFIN) grant to collect ageing structures of the snapper grouper species,

¹ These averages do not include sheepshead after 2011, as well as a number of other species, as they were removed from the complex in 2012. See Amendment 25 for list of species removed from complex.

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