



## Introduction

On the middle and outer continental shelf of the southeastern United States, areas of moderate- to high-relief live bottom (sponge-coral) reefs and rocky outcrops in depths from 120-200 ft provide habitat for schools of vermilion snapper (“beeliners”) that support important commercial and recreational fisheries. Small juveniles can be found on inner-shelf live bottom (60-100 ft), but most fishing takes place on middle-shelf “snapper banks” (120 ft) and shelf-edge “rocky reefs” (180 ft). Managed by federal fishery management agencies as part of the “Snapper-Grouper Complex”, vermilion snapper are subject to heavy fishing pressure and considered to be experiencing overfishing.

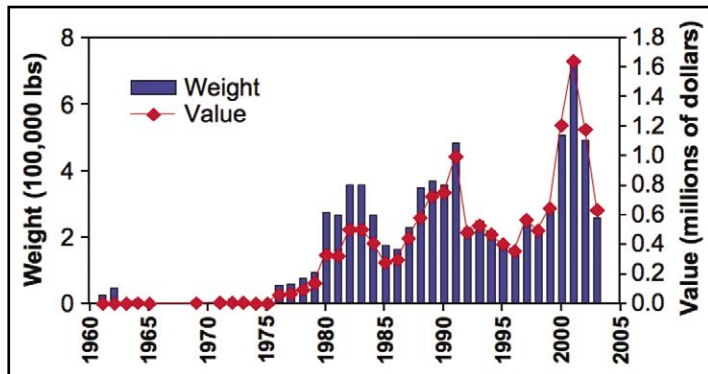


Figure 1. South Carolina commercial vermilion snapper landings in pounds and dollars.

## Commercial Fishery Harvest

Vermilion snapper support a regional offshore fishery with landings recorded in South Carolina since the late 1970s (Figure 1). These landings in South Carolina have been cyclical, with periods of high and low catches; the highest landings to date were reported in 2002. Prices have been good, with fishermen being paid about \$2.40 per pound in the two most recent years. Recent landings in South Carolina appear to be on the downward trending part of a cycle that had peak landings in 2002.

## Recreational Fishery Harvest

Vermilion snapper are a favorite target of head boats (party boats that charge by the head for a full or half day fishing) and other recreational fishing boats on natural reefs, particularly shelf-edge rocky reefs. Although recreational catches of vermilion snapper had a general downward trend since 1982, catches have increased slightly since the most recent period of low catches in 2002 (Figure 2).

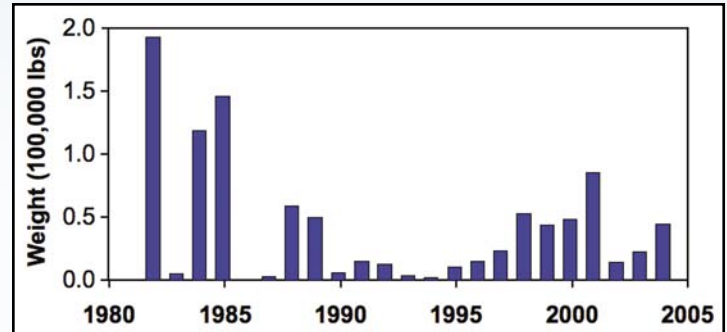


Figure 2. South Carolina recreational vermilion snapper landings in pounds.

## Fishery Independent Sampling

Numbers of vermilion snapper in MARMAP (Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment and Prediction) fish trap catches have shown a decreasing trend, and have been below the 17-year average since 1997 (Figure 3). Catches in 2004 reported in 1988.

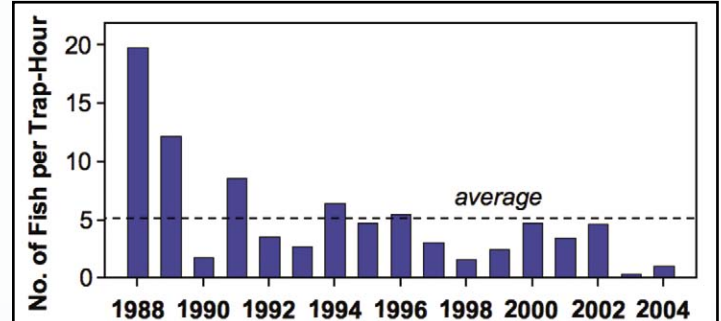


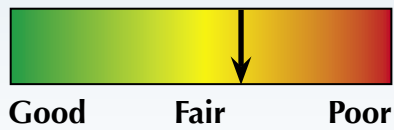
Figure 3. Number of vermilion snapper caught per trap per hour in MARMAP fish trap surveys.

## Overall Condition of the Stock and Status of Management

Vermilion snapper is classified by federal fishery managers as not overfished, but undergoing overfishing. This means that the proportion of the stock taken by a fishery is too high (undergoing overfishing), but that the biomass of the stock is not too low (not overfished). Because overfishing is occurring, additional regulations on the fishery have been proposed.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has proposed additional restrictions on the commercial fishery for vermilion snapper for the region from North Carolina to Florida, to include a 821,000 pound commercial quota in addition to the existing 12-inch minimum size. Additional regulations on the recreational

fishery include increasing the minimum size from 11 to 12-inches, eliminating the existing 10 fish per day bag limit, while implementing a seasonal closure of the recreational fishery in January and February for the region.



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