

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Date: December 12, 2018
Subject: Goliath grouper review and discussion

Purpose:

Provide a review and discussion on next steps for goliath grouper research and management and seek direction on adopting alternative stock status indicators as management goals for goliath grouper in state waters.

Summary:

At the April 2018 meeting, the Commission discussed goliath grouper management, biology, stock status, and stakeholder feedback. Public feedback received in 2017-2018 was divided between support of a limited goliath harvest and support for maintaining a catch-and-release-only fishery. The Commission chose not to pursue a limited harvest and directed staff to provide information on next steps for goliath research and management, with the aim of continuing goliath stock rebuilding.

Given the data-poor nature of this fishery (e.g., 28 years of no landings, high uncertainty in historic landings, many unknowns in life history), it is difficult to assess stock status and objectively evaluate whether the population is rebuilt. However, based on a 2016 FWC assessment, we know goliath grouper abundance in south Florida has increased since the closure.

Based on goliath being long lived and lack of typical data streams, standard stock assessments are not suitable for determining stock status. Staff suggests setting management goals based on monitoring alternative stock status indicators including relative indices of abundance, estimation of population size, increased abundance on natural reefs, population age structure, and improved genetic diversity.

Staff will provide an overview of goliath grouper research that will help determine relative stock status based on the management metric indicators. Staff will discuss how recent events, such as the 2017-2018 red tide and habitat damage from Hurricane Irma, may have impacted the stock.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends the Commission adopt alternative stock status indicators as management goals for goliath grouper in state waters and direct staff to produce a stock status update for review at a future Commission meeting in 2022.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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