Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Petition to Delist the Common Snook (***Centropomus undecimalis***) as a species of special Concern.

Dr. Russell Nelson, Director
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission1
Division of Marine Fisheries
2540 Executive Center Circle West, Suite 106
Tallahassee, FL 32311

850-487-0554
Nelson_R@dep.state.fl.us

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Introduction

Snook is the most targeted marine species in the Atlantic coast and the third most targeted species in the Gulf coast of Florida. This species is found from central Florida south, usually inshore, in coastal and brackish waters, along mangrove shorelines, seawalls, and bridges; also on reefs and pilings near shore.

The Common snook is presently designated as a species of special concern [Chapter 39-27.005(2) Florida Administrative Code]. Although this designation may have been warranted ten years ago, when the spawning potential ratio (SPR) on the west coast may have been as low as 5% (Taylor, 1991) it is no longer necessary due to the success of our present management regime. Currently the snook populations are expected to exceed the 40% SPR management goal (Muller, 1999); therefore, the Division of Marine Fisheries staff requests that the Commission removes snook from the species of special concern list.

Biological Information

The **current snook regulations** were designed to maintain the stocks at a minimum of **40%** spawning potential ratio (SPR)[1] . Although the Atlantic and Gulf coast snook populations are now considered as distinct stocks, the MFC's policy has been to manage snook with a single set of regulations. Understanding, compliance, and the effectiveness of resource protection have increased with a standard size and bag limit. The present regulations are as follows:

1. 26-34" slot limit,
2. two fish bag limit,
3. a closed season from 12/15 through 1/31 and 6/1 through 8/31, and
4. hook and line is the only gear allowed.

Data indicates that the number of snook stamps sold in Florida has been increasing, and there were over 55,000 stamps sold in the Atlantic, and over 89,000 sold in the Gulf, in 1997. Thus, the Commission took measures designed to minimize fishing mortality and achieve the 40% SPR goal. The enhanced management measures implemented in 1998 accounted for the effects on the fishery of human population growth, and are expected to create a buffer against increasing angler participation in the snook fishery.

The latest stock assessment (Appendix I) indicates that the present management plan will achieve a 42-45 SPR on the Atlantic coast and a 42-44% SPR on the Gulf coast. In general, marine finfish have not been considered for listing as threatened or endangered species until SPR levels have fallen well below 1%. Florida snook stocks appear to be healthy, and with an adequate biomass buffer against mortality associated with the unusual winter temperature drops, and are being harvested on a sustainable level.

References

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Taylor R.G., Whittington J.A., Bruger G.E., Haymans D.E., Howard K.S., Murphy M.D., Muller R.G. 1991. An assessment of the trends in abundance for common snook from naples - Marco Island, Palm Beach - Jupiter Inlet, and Tampa Bay, Florida. Florida Marine Research Institute.

[1] One of the models used is to estimate the spawning potential ratio (SPR or spawning stock biomass per recruit - SSBR) for a species. **SSBR is a measure of the total mature biomass, or weight, of a standing stock in an exploited fishery in relation to what it would be if it were an un-fished stock.** For example, a 40% SPR means that the total biomass of the mature stock after fishing is 40% of what it would be if it were not being exploited. Many species are now managed to achieve between a 30-40% SPR.