



# Gag Grouper Fact Sheet

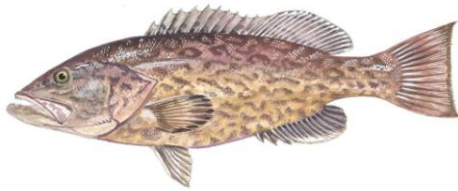


Image courtesy of Duane Raver

## Basic Biology

Latin name: *Mycteroperca microlepis*

Range: In the Atlantic Ocean from North Carolina to Brazil and throughout the Caribbean.

Habitat: Juveniles are found in estuaries and sea grass beds, whereas adults live offshore over rocky hard bottom and coral reefs in waters 60-500 feet deep

Diet: Fish and crustaceans

Age and growth: Maximum age of 26 years; maximum size of 58"; maximum weight of 81 lbs. Gag are protogynous hermaphrodites, which means they begin life as females then eventually change sex, becoming males. About 50% of females mature at 24" and age 3. All fish less than 35" are female, while most gag are males after reaching 45".

## Sustainability

- The most recent stock assessment for gag was conducted in 2006. The gag fishery in the South Atlantic is not overfished and the annual catch limit was recently reduced to prevent overfishing. When either the annual catch limit of gag or the aggregate catch limit for gag, red and black grouper combined is harvested the entire shallow water grouper fishery closes.
- A minimum size limit of 24" prevents harvest of immature gag and there is a January through April spawning season closure for all shallow water groupers.
- Vertical hook-and-line is the primary gear type used by grouper fishermen, followed by spearfishing. These gears have very little interaction with surrounding habitat. Many other snapper and grouper species co-occur with gag but prohibitions of trawl nets, traps and longlines have effectively reduced bycatch to very low levels.
- A deepwater coral area off the east coast of Florida has been closed to snapper and grouper fishing since 1994 to act as an experimental area for evaluating the effectiveness of marine reserves for the management and conservation of reef fish.

## Info for Chefs

- Gag grouper is often misidentified as black grouper because these two species look very similar. On gag, the tail and anal fins have white margins, while the black grouper does not. Gag is more common in both the Gulf and South Atlantic, whereas black grouper is usually found only off of southern Florida.

## Info for Servers

- Gag grouper are the most common grouper off of the southeast coast of the U.S.
- Though gag groupers live far offshore as adults, during their juvenile stage they live in near shore estuaries like salt marshes. This is an important connection between the health of coastal ecosystems and a popular offshore seafood item.

Sources: Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 10, Stock Assessment Report 1, 2006 (updated 2007) – Accessed at [www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/) on 27 August, 2007.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. 2009. Amendment 16 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. Accessed at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) on 1 December, 2009

[www.fishbase.org](http://www.fishbase.org); [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)