



Triggerfish Fact Sheet



Image courtesy of Duane Raver

Basic Biology

Latin name: *Balistes capriscus*

Range: Triggerfish are found on both sides of the Atlantic in tropic and temperate waters, north and south of the equator, and in the Gulf of Mexico

Habitat: Hard bottom areas like rock formations, reefs, and wrecks

Diet: Small mussels, sea urchins, and barnacles

Age and growth: Triggerfish reach sexual maturity at approximately 2 to 3 year of age, and 6-7 inches in length; they can live as long as 16 years and reach lengths of 22 inches

Sustainability

- Locally, triggerfish are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) as part of the snapper-grouper complex. In the Gulf of Mexico, triggerfish are managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC).
- Triggerfish are caught by boats fishing for snappers and groupers using hook and line.
- No stock assessment has been conducted for Atlantic triggerfish, and because of data inadequacies it is unlikely a stock assessment will be conducted until the harvest increases.
- The most recent stock assessment of Gulf of Mexico triggerfish (2005) concluded that triggerfish is undergoing overfishing, though there are many uncertainties in the data, and is likely to be approaching an overfished condition. This stock assessment did review rebuilding plans and suggested that the triggerfish population can rebuild quickly.
- The SAFMC has a limited access permit for the snapper-grouper fishery and is reducing the pressure on the snapper-grouper complex. In Florida and the Gulf of Mexico triggerfish are managed with a minimum size limit of 12 inches, which is significantly larger than the size of sexual maturity.
- Because of their young age at maturity, rapid growth and high fecundity (one female can lay millions of eggs each year) triggerfish have a high resilience to fishing pressure.

Info for Chefs

- Triggerfish availability may be sporadic because it is typically caught incidentally by fishermen targeting snapper. As triggerfish has gained popularity fishermen are beginning to target it more frequently.

Info for Servers

- Triggerfish exhibit harem spawning behavior and parental care of eggs. Males dig the nest and attract a mate. The male will guard the territory while the female guards the eggs for one or two days until hatch. Males may have more than one nesting female in their territory.
- The triggerfish gets its name from the action of its dorsal spines. The first spine is large, and when erect it remains so until the smaller second spine is deflexed, triggering the first.

Sources: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council: www.safmc.net; Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council: www.gulfcouncil.net; Southeast Data, Assessment and Review, 2005: www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar; FishBase: www.fishbase.com; Simmons, C.M. 2008. Gray triggerfish reproductive behavior, early life history and competitive interactions between red snapper in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Auburn University Doctoral Dissertation.